Trade Unions Organising EU Employees

A study of the staff unions in the European Commission in Brussels

Knut Tore Stokke

Februar 2004
# Index

INDEX .............................................................................................................................................................. I

PREFACE .......................................................................................................................................................... IV

1. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................................... 1

  1.1 TRADE UNIONS ORGANISING EU EMPLOYEES .................................................................................. 1
  1.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND .............................................................................................................. 2
  1.3 STAFF UNIONS AS RESEARCH OBJECTS ............................................................................................ 4
  1.4 LIMITING THE STUDY .......................................................................................................................... 5
  1.5 THEORIES OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ......................................................................................... 7
  1.6 ASPECTS OF THE STAFF UNIONS ....................................................................................................... 8
  1.7 EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND .................................................................................................................. 10
  1.8 REMAINING CHAPTERS ...................................................................................................................... 10

2. THEORIES .................................................................................................................................................. 13

  2.1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................... 13
  2.2 STAFF UNION AS A TERM .................................................................................................................... 13
    2.2.1 Defining the term .......................................................................................................................... 13
    2.2.2 Staff unions vs. other trade unions and interest groups ............................................................... 14
  2.3 INTERGOVERNMENTAL PERSPECTIVE ............................................................................................ 16
  2.4 INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES ....................................................................................................... 18
  2.5 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ...................................................................................................... 21
  2.6 MULTI LEVEL GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE ................................................................................... 23

3. METHODS AND DATA ............................................................................................................................ 26

  3.1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................... 26
  3.2 METHODICAL APPROACH ................................................................................................................... 26
  3.3 DATA AND DATA COLLECTION .......................................................................................................... 27
    3.3.1 Interviews .................................................................................................................................. 28
    3.3.2 Documents ............................................................................................................................... 30
    3.3.3 From data to results .................................................................................................................. 32
  3.4 MAKING THEORETICAL TERMS OPERATIONAL .............................................................................. 33
  3.5 LIMITS OF THE STUDY ....................................................................................................................... 34

4. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS ............................................................................................................................ 36

  4.1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................... 36
  4.2 THE BACKGROUND OF THE STAFF UNIONS ................................................................................... 36
    4.2.1 History of the unions .................................................................................................................. 37
5. **CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETING THE EMPIRICAL RESULTS** ................................................. 74

5.1 **INTRODUCTION** ........................................................................................................ 74

5.2 **INTERGOVERNMENTAL PERSPECTIVE** .................................................................. 74

5.3 **INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES** ............................................................................. 76

5.3.1 **Rational choice institutionalism** ........................................................................... 77

5.3.2 **Sociological and historical institutionalism** ........................................................ 78

5.3.3 **Institutions of interest representation** .................................................................... 80

5.4 **ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE** ........................................................................ 81

5.4.1 **Organisational structure** .................................................................................... 81

5.4.2 **Organisational demography** .............................................................................. 82

5.4.3 **Organisational locus** .......................................................................................... 83

5.4.4 **Institutionalisation** .............................................................................................. 83
Preface

This study concludes my Cand. Polit degree in Political Sciences at the University of Oslo. It has been an enriching experience to perform my own scientific research. Even though it was a modest project, it provided necessary challenges to give me some insight to the art of political science research, but also more generally to performing and finishing autonomous projects. Several persons have contributed to this work with scientific advice, guidance in the English language, and not least friendly advice and moral support. Thus, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Morten Egeberg for support and advice. Furthermore, I am also grateful to Marthe Helene Bogerud, who proof-read the manuscript and helped me with the language, and my family and friends for moral support. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my wonderful soul mate Anette for her support throughout the process, and for encouraging me to take a term as exchange student, which allowed me to gather data in Brussels.

Oslo, February 2004
1. Introduction

1.1 Trade unions organising EU employees

This thesis deals with the trade unions that organise employees in the institutions of the European Union. In other words, it deals with unionism within the EU institutions. Trade unions that organise employees in national governmental institutions have been subjects of research for a long time, but knowledge about the organisation of the employees in the EU institutions has been close to non-existing. This thesis aims at exploring that blank spot. The topic is composed of two broad fields within political sciences: The study of organisations and institutions, and the study of the European Union and European integration. The former being a more genuine part of political sciences than the latter, which is more of a topic-based research area. Organisational or institutional studies could be one component of European studies together with others like international relations. European studies are also multi-disciplinary, and go beyond political science. Regardless of how one chooses to categories these traditions, they are creating the scientific background for the study of trade unions organising EU employees. Trade unions can be described as organisations or institutions, and the study of trade unions have often been based on organisational or institutional studies. European studies provide information on the polity, in which the examined trade unions operate. Organisational or institutional studies are, however, also important in understanding the organisations and institutions of this polity.

The thesis is composed of an explorative study of trade unions organising the employees of the European institutions and an interpretation of the empirical findings in the light of theoretical perspectives on European integration. Trade unions organising employees of governmental institutions could also be named staff unions, as they are organising staff of EU institutions. This term will be used in this thesis,
unless otherwise is mentioned as it is somewhat more precise than trade unions\(^1\). The staff unions in the European institutions have not received much scientific attention, and therefore an explorative study is chosen. The main focus of an explorative study is to gather empirical material on a subject. This study aims at answering the following three questions: \textit{Who are the staff unions organising employees in EU institutions? How do they work? Are they able to influence decision-making in EU institutions?} I will return to these questions in section 1.4, as well as in chapter two.

The first chapter will introduce the general topic and the more concrete parts of this study. First, a historical background to unionism in EU will be given in section 1.2, whereas staff unions as research objectives will be introduced in section 1.3. In section 1.4 the limitations of the thesis are presented. Limits of the study are drawn both in respect to the units involved and the institutions they cover. The theoretical perspectives applied to the study are briefly described in section 1.5. Section 1.6 looks at the concrete aspects of the staff unions examined in the empirical analysis. The empirical data behind the thesis are introduced in section 1.7. Finally, section 1.8 reveals the structure of the remaining chapters.

\subsection*{1.2 Historical background}

The European Union builds on more than 40 years of integration in Western Europe. Today, it is a complex system that spans into most policy areas of the member states. As EU and its predecessors gradually have expanded over the years, there has been a similar growth in the scientific attention towards European integration. Thus it is, as mentioned earlier, close to being a scientific discipline of its own, where history, law, economics and political science are central elements. Despite this massive attention, all aspects of the system are not covered yet. Perhaps they never will be, as much could be presented as an aspect of the European Union or European integration. Up to this point, the trade unions that organise the employees of the European institutions have been one of the blank spots in the study of the European Union and European integration.

\footnote{The implications of making this distinction will be examined further in chapter two, where the term staff union is discussed.}
integration. As this subject is almost completely without scientific research\(^2\), a natural point of departure is exploring the area without any clear assumptions of what to find. This section will describe the historical background of the relationship between employer and employees in the European institutions, and thereby give an understanding of the historical background of the staff unions.

At the same time as the policy areas and importance of EU and its predecessors grew, the administrative system and the EU institutions increased equally. The development of a relationship between employer and employees followed the raising number of civil servants being employed in the institutions. A set of regulations on this relationship, known as the Staff Regulations were formed and adopted by the Council as early as 1968 (Commission 2004a). Parts of the system found in these regulations were implemented already in the late 1950s in the European Coal and Steel Community\(^3\). The Staff Regulations enabled staff to elect representatives that secured their interests and rights through consultations with their employers, the European institutions. The system was based on General Meetings of Staff in every location of an institution. The General Meeting elected representatives for a Local Staff Committee, and the Local Staff Committee elected the local representatives to the Central Staff Committee. Besides these committees, there was established Joint Committees. These were composed of an even number of staff representatives and officials from the administration of the institution. The Joint and Staff committees deal with different tasks, but common to all of them are the ideas of letting the employees be heard, and ensuring smooth running of the institutions by solving practical questions. The most central task of these committees is to give advice on staff management. The committees could affect structural matters through their advice. As the relationship between employer and employees developed, staff established their own trade unions. In the beginning the institutions did not acknowledge these trade unions; however they got a final recognition in 1974. This recognition opened up for discussions between the administration and the unions

\(^2\) There are some references to the staff unions, and I will come back to these in section 1.7 below.
through a so-called concertation process. The unions are given the right to let their view be heard, but the concertation process does not allow negotiations in the sense that an agreement between the unions and the administration has to be reached. In the concertation process the more political questions are dealt with, while the staff representation mainly deals with more practical questions. The concertation process opens for influence by the staff unions on changes in the staff policy area. Such changes can in the next step affect the institution and thereby its decision-making. The nature of the concertation will be further examined later on. For now, it will be described as negotiations as that is the term used by the staff unions.

The staff is, in other words, represented by two systems: Staff representation and staff union concertation. However, the staff unions are also dominating the staff representation, and this blurs the distinction between the systems.

1.3 Staff unions as research objects
The staff unions in this study have specialised in organising EU institutions’ employees. Further understanding of the European Union will be gained by looking into the staff unions. Insight is gained, first of all, by learning about previously undescribed actors in the European Union. Secondly, it is gained by looking at how the staff unions work inside EU institutions, and finally through the staff unions’ influence on EU decision-making. Due to the very limited knowledge about these organisations, the staff unions are undescribed actors in EU. The way they work and their influence is equally undescribed.

The staff unions represent staff in two different ways: On one hand these unions earn the right to represent staff in the staff representation through elections to the Staff Committees. At the same time they earn a right to negotiate with the institutions when new proposals or questions that might affect personnel policy or the broader working conditions for staff are raised. From a national context we know that staff

---

3 The European Coal and Steel Community was the predecessor of the European Community. The European Community was, in turn, the predecessor of the European Union.
unions not only are influential actors in cases that relate to the personnel policy of governmental institutions. They have also influence on structural changes, like demography, organisational structure and determining the location of an institution. Roness (1993) gives an example of this when he shows how Norwegian staff unions are given a say. The primary arguments behind this are that the unions contribute with expertise, and that their involvement, make changes in public policy more acceptable to staff (Ibid). Policy areas not related to personnel policy, or structural changes in the institution, cannot be expected to be influenced by the staff unions. It can, however, be problematic to draw a clear line on whether a case is related to this or not. A natural assumption would be that the staff unions influence will weaken as cases became less related to personnel policy and structural changes that affects personnel policy. As mentioned above, the participation in structural changes also affects other aspects of the institution. Thus, when the staff unions participate in such changes, they must be understood as political actors. The outcome of the structural changes may have profound effects on the organisations, and the decision-making within.

1.4 Limiting the study

As in most theses, there is a need to specialise the focus in order to get beyond the surface. All together, there are probably somewhere between 15 and 20 staff unions that organise employees of the European institutions. There is no precise number because of lacking scientific attention, and the many different EU institutions and locations. It could have been within the limits of this thesis to describe all of these unions, and thereby find the precise number, but that would not leave room for more than a rather short description. Instead, I have chosen to focus only on a selection of the staff unions. Theoretical approaches that in my eyes contribute to explaining why the unions are important and how they can be understood have also been included. This thesis will therefore rest on a study of the six staff unions organising employees of the European Commission in Brussels. The thesis, therefore, only answers who these staff unions are, how they work and whether they have any influence on EU decision-making. Thus, the questions should be reformulated to who the staff unions
in the Commission in Brussels are, how they work, and whether they have any influence on EU decision-making. Whether these results are valid also for the other staff unions in EU institutions, is discussed in section 3.5. The Commission has employees located several places within EU, but only the six unions organising the Commission’s employees in Brussels, will be analysed here. These six unions are: Union Syndicale (US), Renouveau et Démocratie (R&D), Fédération de la Fonction Publique Européenne (FFPE), Association des Fonctionnaires Indépendants pour la Défense de la Fonction Publique Européenne (TAO/AFI), Syndicat des Fonctionnaires Européens (SFE) and Syndicat des Fonctionnaires Internationaux (SFIE).

The Commission is by far the biggest employer of the EU institutions. This is the primary reason behind selecting staff unions from the Commission. It is also the only EU institution that has a considerable amount of A-grade personnel. It is plausible to expect these officials to be more influential unionists as they are policy makers and managers, unlike the B, C and D grades. Among the groups, A-grade officials are closest to the popular perception of a bureaucrat. B-grades, on the other hand, take care of senior administrative tasks. The C-grades are secretaries and clerks, while D-grades are more general service personnel (Nugent: 2001:169). This division is about to change as the Commission is going through an administrative reform process at the moment. However, the thesis is based on the old system as that was valid during the data collection. Thirdly, the Commission is, and has been perceived as, the engine behind the integration process. One could therefore expect that the staff unions here are the most “genuine” European staff unions, as they organise the staff of the most “genuine” European institution. This is another aspect that makes the staff unions in the Commission more interesting. Finally, the Commission is also the most “genuine” European institution because it is designed unlike most other institutions above the national level, and it is also responsible for representing and protecting the Community or “European” interest.

---

4 Most of the staff unions have also got English names, but these are not as frequently used as the French ones, even in English texts. I have therefore chosen to rely on the French names only. The abbreviations, which are based on the French
The focus on Brussels is chosen because a thorough description of all the unions operating in the Commission and their relationship with the employer would go beyond the limits of the thesis. Furthermore, most of the A-grade officials are located in Brussels. A study of the Brussels’ unions will reveal if there are differences in unionism among the grades as there are many B, C and D grades here too. Brussels is also by far the biggest Commission location, and it seems natural to assume that the largest unions are present here. Most of the six unions have also sections in other Commission locations or in the other European institutions located in Brussels. This makes the selection, to some extent, also representative to the other European institutions

1.5 Theories of European integration

In order to make more sense of the empirical findings, it is vital to use theoretical lenses. Apart from contributing to the understanding of the empirical results, the theoretical perspectives also give guidelines to which aspects of the staff unions it might be interesting to look into. There are several theoretical perspectives that all have been applied to European integration. In this study, I have chosen to use parts of four broad perspectives among theories of European integration. These are a liberal intergovernmental perspective, institutional perspectives, an organisational perspective and the multi level governance perspective. The four perspectives are meant to interpret the empirical findings on the staff unions.

A liberal intergovernmental perspective is chosen mainly as a contradiction to the presence and influence of the staff unions. It also contributes to examine the importance of nationality in the staff unions, as this is considered the important conflict line in EU within intergovernmental perspectives. Institutional and organisational perspectives are chosen to provide a better understanding of the institutions and conflict lines that are at work within them. Another important aspect

names, will primarily be used.

\(^{3}\) For further details see section 3.5.
is the autonomy of institutions and that the institutions develop their own structures as a result of this. Such structures can be a social dialogue between employer and employee. The establishment of the Joint Committees and negotiations between the staff unions and the Commission can be understood as ways of institutionalising the conflict line between employer and employees. Furthermore, institutional perspectives have been used in other studies of trade unions in general^{6}. Multi level governance is chosen because it captures the different ways to understand how the staff unions operate. Multi level governance is based on the idea that EU is a complex machinery. Therefore, the staff unions are interesting because they can be understood as a small piece of the big machinery. The staff unions are also interest groups that can use international trade union affiliation to influence the working conditions of its members. Affiliation to international trade union confederations has also got organisational and institutional aspects, as the staff unions are considered an equal part to national unions. However, they are also an interest group that has privileged access to the decision-making as they have the right to negotiate with their employer, in this case the Commission. The theories will be further introduced in chapter two, while the questions raised will be discussed in chapter five in light of the empirical results.

1.6 Aspects of the staff unions
It would make little sense to explore every aspect and detail of the six staff unions. Instead, I will try to focus on some aspects that I believe are particularly interesting. Together, these aspects will give answers to who the staff unions are, how they work, and what kind of influence they have. A description of the six staff unions in the study will provide answers to who they are. The working methods and the environment the staff unions work in will describe how they work. Measuring influence is a harder task, but a small case study of the administrative reform of the Commission, together with the descriptions of the staff unions will hopefully provide a general assessment of their influence.

\footnote{For instance Roness (2001).}
The theories have also affected which aspects I will look into when describing the staff unions: Nationality was mentioned above, as one aspect that could be connected to intergovernmental perspectives. International trade union affiliation can, as we saw, be linked to the multi level governance perspective. What are central parts in a description of the staff unions? It seems natural to find what separates the different unions and what they have in common. It is likely to assume that there are some clear differences as six unions are competing for around 20000 potential members.7

Equally interesting, it will be to investigate whether there are similarities among these unions as they are working in the same environment and organising the same employees. The more concrete points, where similarities and differences are expected to be found, follow below.

One possible division lies in the political ideology of the unions. This is a well known division among trade unions in general, and it is equally interesting to examine within EU institutions. How are the unions organised? Both the staff unions’ organisational structure and their external relations are of interest. How do they get their resources and what kind of resources do they have? This seems to be essential in providing information on the staff unions’ influence as well. How do they work with the Commission and each other? The formal system of both representation and concertation was mentioned above, but the working style of the unions could also be interesting to look into. In this respect it is also interesting to look at the regulations of both staff representation and concertation. What kind of issues do they work on? Are the unions only concerned with narrow personnel policy or do they also have a wider more community oriented view? All of these aspects will be dealt with in the empirical analysis.

7 This number reflects all staff working for the Commission in Brussels, and not only the permanent staff. Both permanent and other staff is entitled to apply for membership in the staff unions. In addition, retired officials are also entitled to membership. There are no calculations of the size of all this groups together, and the number must therefore be seen as a rough estimate.
As mentioned, the term influence is hard to measure. Several of the aspects mentioned above will give indications on the influence of the staff unions. Some more general remarks of their influence can be given by reviewing these indications together. By using the administrative reform of the Commission as a case, further indications on the staff unions’ influence could be found. Here, influence relates to the staff unions’ ability to shape the staff policy or proposals that affect the staff policy.

1.7 Empirical background
As mentioned above, there has not been significant scientific research on the staff unions that organise employees in the European Institutions. In fact, to my knowledge the staff unions are only mentioned briefly by House of Lords (1988), Stevens and Stevens (2001) and Sletnes (2002). In none of these references the main focus has been to describe the staff unions as organisations. The report from House of Lords dealt with the issue of staffing the Community Institutions, and only looked at how staff representation was arranged. Stevens and Stevens described the bureaucrats in Brussels (or the bureaucrats in EU institutions in general), and they shortly described the main staff unions. Sletnes reviewed the unions as one of several factors influencing the human resources part of the on-going administrative reform in the Commission. The staff unions in the EU institutions are, in other words, still undescribed.

With these references as a background, I collected some new data to build my study on. This includes interviews with the six different staff unions and one Commission official with experience in representing the Commission as employer. Apart from interviews, data have been collected from documents presented by subjects of interviews, as well as the web pages of the staff unions and the Commission.

1.8 Remaining chapters
This section looks at the structure of the thesis. It provides information of why this structure was chosen and sketches the general points of each chapter of the thesis.
The introduction is followed by a chapter that presents the theories and useful terms in thesis. In chapter three the methodical questions are dealt with. Chapter four reveals the empirical findings, and therefore describes the staff unions, how they work, and their influence. In chapter five the empirical findings of chapter four are interpreted through the theoretical perspectives. Finally, chapter six draws the conclusions and summons the main findings in the thesis.

Chapter two introduces the theoretical perspectives. They are presented in order to provide a theoretical background for the study of staff unions. However, the main purpose of the theories is to interpret the empirical results. The term staff union will also be clarified in this chapter.

In chapter three methodical questions are raised and answered. This includes the data that the thesis rests on. Central points in this chapter are the weaknesses and strengths of the data collection, as well as to how theoretical terms are operationalised and measured in a satisfying way. This chapter will also look further into the choices made in order to make this theme manageable in size for this thesis. Finally, it specifies the implications these choices have had on the possibility to generalise from the study.

Chapter four describes the six staff unions and the empirical findings of my study. The staff unions are compared to reveal both differences and similarities. A central issue among the differences seems to be political sympathy or ideology. Differences between the grades and nationalities of their members, and the staff unions’ missions are also discussed. In this context mission means the issues the staff unions are working on. The most important similarity is that all the staff unions seem committed to fight for a strong civil service that is independent from national pressure, and a strong Commission as the motor of further European Integration. It appears, in other words, that the unions share some common norms and values. Another similarity is that they are open for any employee regardless of nationality or grade, and in most of the unions also regardless of political links. Finally, their organisations have similar
structures; in particular the main bodies of the organisation are similar. The staff representation and the concertation negotiations are described. It seems that the staff unions have a rather confrontational working style, and that work is primarily done by the members, to some extent on a voluntary basis. The staff unions appear to have some influence on the Commission. This seems to depend on their ability to provide input to the Commission, a common staff union stand, and mutual interests with the Commission.

Chapter five links the theories of chapter two with the findings of chapter four. The main purpose of this chapter is an analysis of the empirical findings in the light of the theoretical perspectives. How can the empirical results from chapter four be understood? Each theory’s interpretations are presented in a section. Some of these interpretations are complementary, while others are competitive.

Chapter six is meant for conclusions. This last chapter sums up the findings of the thesis. Apart from this, the chapter also sketches some of the problems that still are left as blank spots. This will be fruitful in the sense that the findings of the thesis have raised new questions.
2. **Theories**

2.1 **Introduction**

This chapter deals with the theoretical perspectives used in the thesis. Four theoretical perspectives are used in order to interpret the results of the empirical analysis of the staff unions. It was not obvious from the onset what kind of perspectives was useful in interpreting the empirical results. This was due to uncertainty about the findings of the empirical analysis. Anyway, the thesis draws upon an intergovernmental perspective, institutional perspectives, an organisational perspective and the multi level governance perspective. The reason behind using several perspectives is mainly that each of them contributes to our understanding of the staff unions in a different way. They concentrate on different aspects and they are therefore shedding light in different angles on the staff unions. The theories are rather briefly introduced as their purpose is secondary to the empirical part of this study. The theories will be described in a general matter, but points that seem to be of specific interest in this study will be elaborated on. The empirical results might contribute to a further highlighting of these points of specific interest.

Before the theories are introduced, the term staff union is clarified. It is vital to give a clear definition of the term staff union, as it appears not to be a well established term. By providing a definition, it is clear what the precise understanding of the term is in this thesis.

2.2 **Staff union as a term**

2.2.1 Defining the term

A number of different terms that describe trade unions with members from the public sector have been used in scientific studies. This is likely to be the result of different understandings of the term public sector, and emphasis on specific parts of the public
sector. Implications of looking at a specific part of the public sector unions will be discussed below, after a clarification of the term. The EU institutions’ employees are normally described as staff. The staff’s trade unions can, thus, be described as staff unions. It seems that staff associations or unions are widely used terms regarding the EU employees’ trade unions\textsuperscript{9}. One obvious problem with this definition is that the term staff is a general term that also covers a lot of other employees. Roness (2001:173, 206) uses the term state employees’ union to describe trade unions that organise employees in the central state apparatus. Following his example, the staff unions can be described as EU institution employees’ unions. This is without doubt a more precise term than staff unions, but the price for being precise is that this term is long and inflexible in use. Thus, the more general term staff union is preferred used in this thesis. The vital point is that the readers interpret the term correctly. In other words that it is understood that staff unions in this thesis means trade unions that organise EU institutions’ employees. This discussion should have made that point clear.

2.2.2 Staff unions vs. other trade unions and interest groups
All public sector employees have a special interest in parts of the public policy. Therefore, the trade unions that organise these employees have a special interest in public policy. Other trade unions could have interests in public policy as well, regardless of they organise public or private sector employees. Because of their size and importance in questions related to societal and economic questions, they can be taken in on advice in the public policy. Besides the more general advisory role mentioned above, the staff unions also have a more specified interest in the personnel policy and structural changes of their institutions.

One could of course question whether the European Union is a government in the same regard as national or regional governments, and thus whether the employees are employees of a governmental institution. The importance here is that such a view will

\textsuperscript{8} Examples include: civil servants’ union or association, civil service union or federation, government employees association, public employees unions, public sector union, public servant union and staff associations.
diminish the importance of the staff unions, and their potential influence on EU decision-making. This will, in turn, make the study of the staff unions less interesting. If EU is seen as a traditional intergovernmental organisation, it is perhaps unlikely that the members of the organisation would consider the employees as public sector employees, and therefore the administration of EU institutions as public policy. The organisation as such would in this view not have sufficient autonomy of its own to be considered a government and, thus, neither have a public policy of its own. This could be exemplified by the fact that structural changes or changes in the personnel policy of the Commission cannot just be adopted by the Commission. Changing the Staff Regulations as an example, demand the same decision-making procedure as changing other EU legislation, namely the involvement of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. On the other hand, this does not mean that the Commission is without power in the matter: The initiative has to come from the Commission, and if the staff unions manage to influence this initiative they might also influence the adopted decision as a result. This absence of total control over structural changes and personnel policy is often found in the national states as well. A cabinet would normally need support from parliament in such cases, even though the relationship between cabinet and parliament is different from the relationship between the Commission and Council and European Parliament.

In addition, EU has some characteristics that do not fit easily with the image of an intergovernmental organisation. The member states have transferred a considerable amount of their powers to the organisation. EU is active and influential in nearly all policy areas. The European Court of Justice stands above the national courts in cases where EU legislation is involved, and the Commission is equipped with powers to ensure that the verdicts of the European Court of Justice are upheld. An organisation with such powers would have to be considered a government, at least a government of some sort, regardless of whether it is understood as an intergovernmental organisation or not.

9 The regulation of employees’ rights and duties is called Staff Regulations. House of Lords (1988) refers to staff and staff associations, and the Euractiv (Euractiv) website uses the term staff unions.
The staff unions can, as mentioned in chapter one, also be understood as interest groups. In this view, they are one of many different interests that try to influence decision-making in EU. Interest groups in the European Union and their influence on EU decision-making have been described by several authors. Greenwood (2003) gives a general description of interest groups at the EU level. Mazey and Richardson (1996) look at the organisation of interest groups in EU. Van Schendelen (2002) describes how interest groups can succeed in influencing EU decision-making. Even though the staff unions can be described as interest groups, they are different from other interest groups in some regards, and these differences are, to my knowledge, not explored by the more general works on interest groups at the EU level. The staff unions differ from other interest groups in their relationship to the EU institutions. As a result of this, the staff unions contact with the EU institutions, through the staff representation and concertation probably differs as well.

2.3 Intergovernmental perspective
A key element in intergovernmental theory, as already sketched above, is the traditional view on intergovernmental organisations. According to Andrew Moravcsik (1993:474)\(^\text{10}\): “… EC can be analysed as a successful intergovernmental regime designed to manage economic interdependence through negotiated policy co-ordination”. This could be rephrased as cooperation among national governments, and would run along traditional liberal ideas in international relations. The organisation, and the institutions it is composed of, is a tool that the national states use to enhance cooperation. When EU is understood as cooperation between member states, intergovernmental perspective is applied mainly on the relations between member states. This separates the intergovernmental perspective from the other theoretical approaches in this study. According to intergovernmental perspective, the organisation only has the neutral role of enhancing cooperation. The cooperation in EU has over the years grown into a considerable size. This means that the

\(^{10}\) This opinion is still maintained even though EU has gone through important changes since this article was presented. Moravcsik builds on the same opinion in his review of Intergovernmental Conferences (1998).
organisation behind it also has had a similar growth, but it is still considered to be a neutral tool used by the member states.

There has been a considerable transfer of power, but according to the intergovernmental perspective, this is a deliberate choice by the member states. They have chosen to transfer power because the benefits of the cooperation within the organisation are greater than the loss of power. Moravcsik (Ibid: 507) claims that the transfer of power actually strengthens the national governments’ control over domestic affairs. As long as this holds true, the nation states will accept the power transfer. If it fails, however, they can withdraw the power by changing the system, or ending their membership. It is, furthermore, considered unavoidable to achieve such a strong cooperation among nation states without a transfer of power to the organisation in charge. Besides the direct benefits of the strong cooperation between the member states, two-level games also produce an indirect benefit for the governments of the member states. The nation states can use the supranational level to legitimise unpopular decisions. By blaming “Brussels” for these unpopular decisions, the national level escapes responsibility, and by this token it could actually strengthen their legitimacy through European integration (Ibid: 515-517). This is, thus, the reason why the national governments’ control over domestic affairs is strengthened

As EU is understood as advanced intergovernmental cooperation, the nation states are considered the only important actors. Every important decision in EU is taken through negotiations among the member states’ governments. These important, history-making decisions are taking place “... in a non-coercive unanimity voting system”, which is rich on information, and has a low transaction cost (Ibid: 498). This means that the preferences of each state are shaped at the national level. Different national interests compete in this shaping of preferences, but their role ends after

---

11 This tool could also be used the other way around: National governments present strong popular opposition towards a proposal, and thereby gain leverage in negotiations about the proposal at EU level. The logic behind is that the national government would have a hard time trying to convince their population and would therefore face problems when
national preferences have been reached\textsuperscript{12}. Each state then negotiates with the other members based on their national preference. In the negotiations, the larger member states are assumed to be the most important actors. In this perspective nationality becomes the only conflict line within the organisation, as each member state has a national preference in all decisions.

An intergovernmental perspective is valuable in the study of staff unions because their existence and possible influence contradict key elements of the intergovernmental perspective. The contradiction rests on the idea that the institutions and organisations in EU should not gain such autonomy and independence that they produce their own unions and influence the policies. Influence from staff unions should at least not shape any of the larger and history-making decisions\textsuperscript{13}. Another interesting aspect in the intergovernmental perspectives is that nationality is seen as the only conflict line. This can be criticised for providing a too simplified understanding of EU. Therefore, it will be interesting to see if nationality is an important conflict line within the staff unions, and if it is the only conflict line, as expected by the intergovernmental perspective.

\subsection*{2.4 Institutional perspectives}

Institutional perspectives have had a revival in political science the last twenty years. Unlike the old institutionalism, the new or neo institutionalism focuses beyond formal rules and regulations (March and Olsen 1989). Aspinwall and Schneider (2000:3) claim that: “the basic premise of neo-institutionalist analysis is that institutions affect outcomes”. Institutions affect the actions of individuals within them. However, the institutional perspectives disagree on what extent the individual action is affected, and by what kind of institutions it is affected. There are different opinions on how to classify neo-institutionalism. Bulmer (1994) divides into rational choice and historical, while Peters (1999) adds also normative, empirical, sociological, and

\footnotesize{implementing the policy. This has, however, not been an important argument from intergovernmentalists. Both of these arguments seem to build on Robert D Putnam’s (1988) idea of “two level” games.\textsuperscript{12} Economic interests are considered the most vital interests, and they therefore dominate the formation of preferences.\textsuperscript{13} There will be a discussion of what decisions are important in the section on Commission reform in chapter four.}
international institutionalisms, as well as institutions of interest representation, before he discusses whether it is one variant or many. Aspinwall and Schneider (2000) prefer the division between rational choice, sociological and historical institutionalism. These three perspectives will be introduced together with Peters’ theory about institutions of interest representation.

The historical and sociological perspectives have more in common between them, than they have with the rational choice perspective. In the rational choice perspectives, the institutions affect individual action less and the term institution is more narrowly understood than in the historical and sociological perspectives. This is to some degree also true for the relationship between the historical and the sociological perspectives. Institutions are defined as norms, rules and culture in the sociological perspective, while informal and formal rules are recognised as institutions in the historical perspective, and rules and procedures in the rational choice perspective (Aspinwall and Schneider 2000:7). Another difference between the rational choice on one hand and the two others on the other hand, is that preference formation is endogenous in the latter perspectives, opposed to exogenous in the former (Ibid). Institutions play a smaller role when the preferences are given exogenously because it means that institutions cannot affect the preference formation of the individual actors. In other words, institutions cannot affect the goals of individual actors.

The rational choice perspective is, in a European context, coming close to the intergovernmental perspective\textsuperscript{14}. The perceptions; individual action is not strongly affected by institutions and preferences are given exogenously, are matching the intergovernmental perspective. In addition, another aspect can be found in both rational choice institutionalism and the intergovernmental perspective. This is the focus on bargain between actors that work strategically to reach their preferred outcomes. Institutions change through evolutionary selection or bargaining processes

\textsuperscript{14} Moravcsik could, for instance, be understood as a rational choice institutionalist, as institutions are given a similar role in his works as in rational choice institutionalism.
according to rational choice institutionalism (Ibid). This seems to resemble the intergovernmental idea that the member states are designing institutions to enhance the cooperation between them. On the other hand, rational choice institutionalism could, unlike intergovernmental perspectives, be applied to different levels of EU. This makes the perspective more applicable on the staff unions.

Historical and sociological institutionalisms strongly emphasise the institutions’ ability to affect individual action. Individual action is, to quote Aspinwall and Schneider (2000:7), “more context-driven than goal-driven”. This could be reinterpreted as an institutional ability to also affect the individuals’ goals, unlike the rational choice institutionalism. The historical and the sociological perspectives differ in where they put their emphasis. The emphasis is on cultural and cognitive features in the sociological perspective, while in the historical perspective it is on structural and constraining features. To exemplify this with a look at the European context, historical institutionalism would focus on how earlier choices have created a context that shapes the choices today. Sociological institutionalism, on the other hand, would focus on how identities and culture are constructed and also on how identities and culture constrain the actors involved.

The staff unions are, as other trade unions, interest groups defending the rights and interests of employees. Peters (1999: 116-125) reviews institutional approaches towards interest representation and interests groups, and finds that much of the studies of interest groups have had institutional aspects. Both the relationship between governmental institutions and the interest groups, as well as the interest groups themselves can be understood with institutional lenses. Peters (Ibid: 124) does, however, not draw any general conclusion on whether the interest groups are best understood through ordinary institutional approaches or more specialised approaches connected to such groups. Pluralism, corporatism and network or community analysis are mentioned as more specialised approaches (Ibid 116-117). Corporatism could be understood as organised ties between state and society, in which the state apparatus and a few big interest organisations, normally only one
organisation for each sector, work to reach compromises (Østerud et al. 1997). There is also often some sort of governmental control of the interest organisations through licenses or finances. Pluralism, on the other hand, indicates a situation where many interest organisations are fighting against each other to be able to influence the state (Ibid). In policy-making processes, network and community ideas rest on government organisations as one of several rather equal participants (Peters 1999:117). Before the empirical results are given, it is not obvious if any of these specialised approaches are more useful in interpreting the results than the general institutional perspectives.

Peters’ specialisation, nevertheless, clarifies how institutional perspectives can be useful in understanding both the relationship between the staff unions and the administration and understanding the staff unions as institutions. Institutional perspectives contribute to understanding the empirical results in different ways. Rational choice institutionalism could explain bargains and negotiations between the staff unions and the administration, and it would emphasise the individual actors almost as much as the institutions. Historical institutionalism could explain how the historical background of the relationship between the administrations and the staff unions are shaping and constraining their choices today, while sociological institutionalism could explain how the presence of a culture or identity shape the same choices. These are all general understandings, and therefore an organisational perspective is introduced. This perspective is valuable to specify how the institutions structure individual behaviour.

2.5 Organisational perspective

The organisational perspective is based on the idea that institutions matter, and that they structure individual behaviour. Like the historical and sociological institutionalism, the organisational perspective accepts that institutions, in certain cases, can affect preference formation. Acknowledging this, the organisational perspective finds that institutional perspectives fail to specify more concrete how institutions structure individual behaviour. The organisational perspective tries to explain this by looking at organisational features. Morten Egeberg (2002) has focused
on how different organisational structures are affecting the actors. Bounded rationality is the main mechanism of the organisational perspective (Egeberg 2003:116). Bounded rationality means that there are limits to how many things the human brain can focus on at any given time. As our society is extremely rich on information, the filtering of information that one gives attention to becomes crucial. The organisational perspective emphasises how organisational features filter information for the actors within the organisation. This is how the organisational features are structuring individual behaviour.

Four organisational features are identified: Organisational structure, demography, locus and institutionalisation (Egeberg 2004). How do these features work? The structure of an organisation consists of is, according to Scott, specifying more or less clearly, who are expected to do what, and how (cited in Egeberg 2004). This means that the interests and therefore the conflict lines could be expected to run along the lines of specialisation within an organisation. The organisational structure in the Commission exemplifies this. There the division is between different sectors, and the conflict lines should therefore run along these lines rather than territorial lines. The specialisation of the Council differs. It follows the territorial lines to a larger degree and the conflict lines could be expected to do the same. Demography within an organisation is the composition of the common features, such as sex, education, nationality and length of service among the actors. According to Egeberg (Ibid), these factors might, under certain conditions influence decision behaviour. Thus, they can be understood as organisational in the regard that proportions of these factors in the population of an organisation are measured. The organisational locus is the physical location and the environment of the organisation. Being located in Brussels could have an impact both on Belgians, but perhaps even more on other nationalities, as they are living and working abroad. The organisational locus could also be linked to other aspects such as the connection between certain roles or identities and physical locations, and the patterns of contact connected to physical distance. In the organisational perspective, institutionalisation takes time, and an organisation might therefore not be an institution in this understanding. As the institutionalisation takes
time it is not likely to have a profound effect in new organisations, while for instance it could be influential in the Commission, as the organisation is quite old. One way of measuring the institutionalisation is to look at the robustness of an organisation; the more institutionalised it gets, the harder it would be to eradicate it, or change it profoundly. There also has to be a development of a *self* in the organisation in order to say that the organisation has been institutionalised (Ibid). This means that the organisation has developed its own identity. Institutionalisation in the organisational perspective is therefore narrower understood than in the institutional perspectives, but it is not a different understanding. Institutionalisation in the organisational perspective is covered by institutionalisation in the institutional perspectives, but the latter understanding covers a wider area than the former.

The importance of an organisational perspective in this study seems obvious. The organisational specialisation into Directorate-Generals (DGs) for different sectors rather than DGs for different national states in the Commission creates an expectation of staff unions organised along other lines than nationality. Likewise, the presence of a conflict line between employer and employees in the Commission could be explained by the fact that the Commission has developed an organisational structure for staff representation. The institutionalisation of this structure has led to the development of the staff unions as we see them today. The development of such a structure could, further, be understood as one factor that contributes to the institutionalisation of the Commission\textsuperscript{15}. By introducing a conflict line between employer and employees in EU institutions, the whole system comes one step closer to the political system that we know from nation states.

2.6 Multi level governance perspective
The multi level governance perspective is, in many ways, less ambitious than the intergovernmental and institutional perspectives. Its purpose is to describe decision-making in EU. Multi level governance accepts that: “... EU was originally created by states to serve their economic and political purpose, but has now metamorphosed into
a much more complex and unpredictable political system.” (Jordan 2001:194). Governance, therefore, is viewed as a better understanding of EU than government, where the latter implies sovereign state control and the former a fractured and decentralised system. According to multi level governance, the relationship in EU is not necessarily a zero sum game between the member states and the community institutions (Marks et al 1996). First of all, there are also other actors involved, namely sub-national governments and different kinds of interest groups. Secondly, transfer of sovereignty from member states to the community does not necessarily only strengthen the community institutions and weaken the member states. Therefore, one of the keys to understand how EU works is through looking at different levels of governance. At least three levels of governance are important in EU: The regional level inside each of the member states, the national level, and the EU level. The regional level can operate directly against both national and EU-level and vice versa. Governance at these levels can be understood as more than just politically elected institutions. Interest groups could for instance be part of governance at all these levels. One example is a business interest group that could be nationally organised, but still have regional sections and being member of a Euro-level trade union confederation. There are several different strategies and ways of working when this is the case. This explains why EU works in such a complex way and often can be hard to understand.

According to Andrew Jordan (2001), there is a clear weakness in the multi level governance perspective because no explanations to how EU has become a system of multi level governance are given. This point makes multi level governance implausible as a grand theory of European integration, at least according to Jordan. This disadvantage is not very important here, as the main focus is to interpret unionism within EU institutions. By recognising that EU is a complex system with a range of different actors, multi level governance opens for staff unions as actors influencing the Commission. The negotiations and staff representation in the Commission could be regarded as small parts of the whole large and complex

15 And perhaps highlighting the role as an actor independent of nation states.
machinery that EU is. The staff unions can be expected to make use of at least two strategies while defending their members’ rights. They can work directly with the administration, or they can use trade union confederations at the EU level to influence decision-making in the EU.
3. Methods and data

3.1 Introduction
In this chapter the methodical questions in the study are raised. These are related to the practical work with the thesis, and they ensure that this work was performed in a scientifically satisfying way. On the other hand, methodical questions are also related to how the results of this study can be understood and interpreted. In total, this implies that the data behind arguments and conclusions are presented for the reader. How the data was collected, and how theoretical terms are made operational and measured.

The chapter will be divided into the following sections: Methodical approach used in the study, data and data collection, making theoretical terms operational, and finally the limits of this study.

3.2 Methodical approach
This is an explorative study. This means, as the word says, that the primary objective is to gather new empirical results through exploration. In other words, the primary goal is to give a description of the staff unions organising employees of EU institutions, their working methods and their influence. The explorative nature of this study also implies that there are no or very few ambitions towards explaining, comparing or generalising. The most important reason behind choosing an explorative study was that the staff unions of the European institutions were practically unknown. An explorative study could of course also be combined with explanations or comparisons, but focusing on explanations or comparisons would go beyond the limits of this study. The study is, however, not entirely explorative. Theories are used to interpret the empirical results that are found. By introducing theoretical interpretations, the thesis is moved towards explanations. However, this comes second to providing new empirical results. The staff unions are also, to some degree, compared with each other in order to find differences and similarities
between them. Both this and the theoretical interpretations are first and foremost included to provide a better description of the unions.

Another characteristic of the methodical approach is that the study is rather intensive. This means that there are rather few units that are being thorough examined. The opposite would be extensive studies with many units and few aspects or variables that are examined. Intensive studies reveal, according to Hellevik (1999:97-99), a broader picture and more details than extensive ones, but they do not open for testing of hypotheses, describing variations and providing generalising explanations. The study is not purely intensive or extensive. It does involve six different units, and thereby goes beyond what could be understood as a case study. On the other hand, several other staff unions could be taken into the study. As the study is of an explorative nature, it does not make much sense to review the number of variables that the units are examined along because part of the exploration is about discovering interesting variables. The purpose has been to strike a balance between intensive and extensive approaches that gives a good description of unionism within EU institutions. The character of the study is also linked to the frames given for this thesis, which I will return to below.

3.3 Data and data collection
The empirical data that the thesis rests on are interviews with key persons in each of the six staff unions, documents from the staff unions, documents from other sources, and an interview with a Commission official with experience in representing the Commission as employer. The documents from other sources include two scientific works mentioned in chapter one, one British governmental report also mentioned in chapter one, official documents from the EU institutions, and documents from various news and information agencies. The interviews and documents from the various staff unions have provided concrete information on who these staff unions are. Information on how the staff unions work were provided by interviews and official documents. In the question of influence in general and particularly the reform
of the Commission, documents from the staff unions, the Commission and news and information agencies were vital.

The staff unions were, in general open towards interviews and sharing documents, but not on all topics. Data on membership and particularly the number of members was considered to be sensitive by all the staff unions. The nationality of the members and the proportion of different grades among the members were to a large extent considered unimportant, and data regarding this was therefore lacking. In some of the staff unions this was also considered to be sensitive information. Some did, however, provide these kinds of data, while others provided rough estimates or no comments at all. It seems obvious that data regarding the number of members is considered sensitive as these data indicate how representative the staff union is, and thereby how influential it ought to be. It is less obvious why the proportions of different nationalities and grades are unavailable. The result is, anyhow, that the data on nationality, grade and number of members are of varying quality. It is particularly the number of members and the proportions of different nationalities that are vague or non-existing.

3.3.1 Interviews
Interviews can be performed in many different ways. The interviews used here were semi-structured and of a qualitative nature. By semi-structured it here means that I had a list of questions, but they were not necessarily asked in a specific order. The persons interviewed were also allowed to elaborate on the questions, and they therefore often touched upon, or answered other questions. The interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes, and the subjects were key-persons from each of the six staff unions, and one official from the administration. Each person was interviewed once, with a possibility to follow up unclear points through e-mail or telephone. The qualitative nature of the interviews implies that the questions were open, the interviews lasted quite long, and there were only a few subjects being interviewed.
There were also some differences regarding the questions asked. Four of the six staff unions had websites\(^\text{16}\), which meant that I had some knowledge about their organisations before the interviews. Some of the questions were therefore already answered for these staff unions. For the other staff unions, the interviews were performed practically without any knowledge of the organisation, and I therefore had to go through some of the basics of the organisation. Furthermore, my knowledge of the whole topic rose after each interview and that this also affected the later interviews. Two of the interviews were conducted over telephone, while the rest were conducted in the subjects’ offices in Brussels. The interviews in Brussels were recorded. This was not possible for the interviews over telephone. Apart from loosing this possibility of recording, the telephone interviews were conducted along the same lines as the other interviews, and notes made during the interviews were rewritten directly afterwards. There was also fixed dates for the telephone interviews to avoid interferences and to ensure sufficient time.

The subjects of interviews were, as mentioned, key persons in their staff union, or in their part of the staff union\(^\text{17}\). One official that had been working with the social dialogue from the Commission’s side was also interviewed. Key persons means that the persons were part of the leadership in the staff unions, and that they were either part-time or full-time unionists. This means that their credibility was high in questions related to describing their own organisation and its position on various subjects. They were also asked questions that touched upon the other staff unions, or described their own influence and unionism within the EU institutions. Their credibility in these questions is, naturally, not very high. The answers to these questions brought together might, on the other hand, be interesting. The Commission official was Head of Unit in DG Personnel and Administration during the time he was working on the social dialogue, and could, thus, be considered a well-informed source. This interview was brought in to balance the views of the unionists regarding

\(^{16}\) US, R&D, FFPE and SFE have their own websites (US; R&D; FFPE; SFE), while SFIE and TAO/AFI do not have websites.

\(^{17}\) Their part of the staff union either implies the Commission, or the location Brussels. For further information see internal organisation section 4.4.1.
the questions of how the staff unions worked and their potential influence on the Commission. This cannot be considered neutral answers to these questions either, but they do provide a balance, and the opinion of the other side.

All the interviews were conducted in the understanding that the data provided would be treated anonymously. This was considered a preferable ethical choice as some of the information could be considered sensitive, or at least contested. The implication of anonymous sources is that interview data only will be given the reference (interview) in the text. However, in the end of the thesis, names of all interview subjects are listed.

3.3.2 Documents
Most of the documents that are used are available online at various websites. There are some methodical questions related to relying on information from online documents. First of all it is connected to the publisher of the information. Is it a source that could be considered reliable? There are few reasons to distrust official documents from EU institutions that are available online, and it seems natural to assume that the information given on a staff union’s websites reflects the union’s official view, unless otherwise mentioned. The information on the staff unions’ websites cannot be assumed to provide an objective view on either a case, or the other unions, but that only reflects the lack of objectivity and it applies to all information from the staff unions on these issues. News and information websites should be critically examined before they are considered reliable. The second question that relates to online documents is possible changes both in documents and their accessibility. This has importance for the possibility of others to access these documents, and the time aspect is important as well. When was a certain position held, has it been changed, and is the document still available? Time and date of last visit to documents cited in this thesis are therefore given in the list of archive documents.

Another kind of problem connected to the use of online documents is that only four of the six staff unions examined had a web site. The access to information for these
four staff unions is, thus, far greater than for the other two. There were also some differences between the four staff unions that had web sites regarding the amount of available information, amount of information available in English and how often the web pages were updated. The language issue is dealt with below. The differences between the staff unions seem connected to the size of the unions, and thereby to their resources. The larger unions have websites, and better information on the websites than the smaller staff unions. The bias towards more available information from some staff unions seems to favour the larger and better resourced staff unions. This bias is perhaps not that important, as it is likely that the staff unions that are larger, more resourceful, and have more available information also are more influential and important actors.

One of the characteristics of the European Union is that all official documents should be available in all the languages of the member state. It would slow down all decision-making, however, if all the languages were used in the day to day business. The solution to this problem has been to use a few languages as working languages. There appears to be different dominating working languages in some of the different DGs in the Commission. In DG Personnel and Administration, the dominating working language has always been French\(^{18}\), and this has led to French as working language in the social dialogue and thereby in the staff unions. The implication of this is not very important regarding official EU documents, as these should be available also in other languages. However, the internal staff unions’ documents are to a large extent French. This has caused some problems as my knowledge of French is very limited.

There are translations of some of the documents, but this differs from one staff union to the other. One of the problems with translations is that if they are considered to be important documents, they must be translated by professionals to ensure that the understanding is the same in both languages. It is seldom that all documents are available in English. The most important document of a staff union; the rules and
regulations, were at least available in four of the six unions examined. In one of the remaining two staff unions there was a description of the organisation in English that provided most of the information found in the rules. Rules are good examples of documents that need a professional translation. Interviews became the information source regarding the internal rules in the staff unions that had no English translation of their rules. This could be problematic as it is harder to catch all the details in an interview. Rules have a tendency to be documents with many details. As the interviews were conducted in English, it was necessary that the subjects were fluent in English. This may have biased the selection of informers, but it is not likely that it had any important effects on the data gathered.

3.3.3 From data to results
To what degree are the collected data sufficient to provide valuable results? One important aspect is precision in the collection of data, also described as the reliability of the data (Hellevik 1999:183). Normally, there would always be possible to collect more data in order to get more results and also better precision in the results. This is also the case in this study, but it has to be held against the frames this thesis operates within. These will be further discussed in section 3.5. The type of results is another point that determines how much data are needed. It is harder to provide results on the working methods of staff unions than on a description of them, and even harder to provide results on the influence of staff unions than on their working methods. The description is, in many ways, the most basic information, while how the staff unions work and what kind of influence they have, are harder to grasp with limited data. It can, thus, be expected that the description of the staff unions is more precise than the assessments of the work and influence of staff unions. The precision, and thereby the reliability of the data, could have been higher, but in an explorative study there is much learning during the process, and this affects the level of precision. Some of the data collected on influence cannot be considered objective, and this could be problematic for the reliability of data, but in general, the data collected, also on influence should have reasonable reliability.

18 At least, this is how the unionists explain the dominance of French language in unionism.
3.4 Making theoretical terms operational

Theoretical terms have to be made operational before empirical results can be used to measure the terms. This problem varies with the different terms: Some theoretical terms have only one clear understanding, while others have several competing understandings. One example of the latter is the term influence. In this study one of the main objectives is to measure the influence of the staff unions. Influence is a term that could be given several different understandings, so it is vital to clarify what understanding is used, and how it is measured.

Influence is here understood as the staff unions’ ability to shape decision-making in the Commission on staff policy or issues that affect staff policy. This opens up for many different ways of measuring influence. In this study, influence will be measured through looking at several indicators that describe the relationship between the staff unions and the administration of the Commission. These include the formal rights of the staff unions described in the Staff Regulations and the Framework agreement as well as a rather brief analysis of the relationship between the staff unions and the Commission during the work on the administrative reform process. Some characteristics of both the Commission and the staff unions will also be used in order to measure influence. There are, in other words, several components measuring the influence of the staff unions, and taken together they will hopefully provide a general picture of their influence. How the staff unions work is here measured through looking at the staff representation and the concertation processes, but also through the scope or missions of the staff unions and their working style.

Making theoretical terms operational is essential in providing relevance between the empirical data and the theoretical terms and problems. This relevancy could be described as the data’s validity (Hellevik 1999:183). It is problematic to measure the validity empirically. A rough estimation can be found by reviewing the theoretical and the operational definitions. These seem to match well regarding how the staff unions work. The operational definition of staff unions’ influence measures at least elements of a theoretical definition of influence, but the theoretical definition could
also include more than the operational definition. Most importantly in this regard is to create an awareness of the problems with measuring staff unions’ influence, and thereby drawing attention to how these empirical results can be understood. The description of who the staff unions are is considered to have just one understanding. Therefore it does not need an explicit operationalisation. This refers to what Hellevik (1999:52) calls face validity. The validity should, therefore, not be problematic regarding the description of the staff unions.

3.5 Limits of the study

This section discusses the choices made to draw the boundaries of this study. There are practical reasons behind the boundaries of a study. In this case the access to the research units, time and the total size of the thesis were important factors. In most, if not all scientific studies practical factors like these will create some boundaries or frames that limit the study.

This study has been limited in the selection of units. The selection of units was not a probability selection, and the empirical findings can therefore not be generalised to the whole universe of staff unions. In other words, there are no possibilities for empirical generalisation, but there could be made analytical generalisations. According to Yin (2003:10), this means that the study will expand and generalise theories. Each of the six staff unions can be considered a case, and common empirical findings in all cases can lead to general theories on staff unions in EU institutions. Yin’s (Ibid: 46) argument is that multiple case studies and “comparative” studies in political sciences, basically are within the same methodical approach.

Some of the arguments behind selecting the six staff unions examined were given in chapter one. These and other arguments will be elaborated on here. First of all, there are the practical factors mentioned above. The physical access to the research objects is not the best from Norway, but a term as exchange student in Belgium provided good access to Brussels. Physical access is not that important in today’s information society where online documents are available everywhere to anyone with internet
access. Interviews could have been, and partly was, performed over telephone as well, so the physical access is perhaps not a weighty argument. The time aspect is, on the other hand, quite important as this research is part of an educational degree. The size of the whole thesis is also connected to that. Due to these practical factors it was unavoidable to limit the study.

Other arguments also apply to limit the number of units within the given frame. In this study, the units have primarily been selected after the EU institution that they organise employees from, and secondly after a given location for this institution. This runs along the lines of specialisation for the staff unions as well. They are, to the extent that they operate in different institutions and locations, organised with branches connected to institution and/or location. To focus on Commission employees’ unions, when a selection of units had to be made, is hardly a contested choice as the Commission is by far the largest employer of the EU institutions. The focus on the Commission location Brussels could be said to run along the same lines; most of the employees of the Commission are located in Brussels. There are, however, other alternative ways of choosing the units. For instance, the reasoning could start from the question of location. In this regard, again, Brussels would seem like the obvious choice. Then, would it be possible to examine all the staff unions operating in Brussels within the frames of this study? In my opinion, it would involve too many units, and perhaps more importantly the working methods and influence would have to be examined in more than just one institution. The total universe of staff unions organising employees of EU institutions is unknown. However, to my knowledge there are another seven staff unions, and there are probably a few more than these as well.
4. Empirical analysis

4.1 Introduction
This chapter gives a thorough description of the six unions organising employees of the Commission in Brussels, how they work, and what kind of influence they have. The six staff unions studied are, as already mentioned: Union Syndicale (US), Renouveau et Démocratie (R&D), Fédération de la Fonction Publique Européenne (FFPE), Association des Fonctionnaires Indépendants pour la Défense de la Fonction Publique Européenne (TAO/AFI), Syndicat des Fonctionnaires Européens (SFE) and Syndicat des Fonctionnaires Internationaux (SFIE). Sub-sections of the chapter deals with the different aspects of the staff unions, and questions related to these aspects. The historical background of the social dialogue as well as the history of the staff unions are presented in section 4.2. The focus then moves on to political sympathies, the organisation of the unions, resources, their membership basis, and their scope. The description of who the staff unions are is rounded up by summarising their differences and similarities in section 4.8. The two last sections, 4.9 and 4.10, review how the staff unions work and whether they have any influence.

4.2 The background of the staff unions
Staff organised in unions did not become recognised in the Commission until 1972 (Stevens and Stevens 2001:58). Some of the unions date further back, to the mid 60s, but it was not until 1974 that the unions and the Commission agreed on a framework agreement for the social dialogue. This opened up for negotiations between the staff unions and the Commission (House of Lords 1988:93). The social dialogue supposedly draws heavily on similar systems in Belgium and France (Interview). Comparing these systems is, however, not considered a topic in this thesis. The basis for the social dialogue is a division into two separate systems: One part is the

---

19 Much of the information revealed in this chapter is built on empirical data gathered in interviews. Most of this information bears the reference (Interview). There are, however, sections where almost all the text is based on interview information, and here the reference is only given in the end of the section.
participation of staff representatives applying the rules set down in the Staff Regulations. The other part is negotiations between the administration and the unions in the concertation process. The Staff Regulations is a set of rules regulating the relationship between the employer and its employees. This set of rules was adopted for all the community institutions in 1968 in regulation 259/68. There was, however, staff representation before the Staff Regulations, and this started already in the 1950s. The Staff Regulations is a part of EU legislative texts, and it must therefore follow the normal decision-making process for new regulations, if it is to be changed. This means that there have not been many changes since the staff regulations were introduced, but there are significant changes coming up under the present administrative reform process.

4.2.1 History of the unions
Three of the six unions in Brussels, US, FFPE and SFIE, date back to the time before the framework agreement of 1974. US was established in 1973, but it was then based on predecessors under different names founded in the 60s. FFPE was founded in 1962, while SFIE also dates back to the 60s. Out of these three unions, three other staff unions have developed within the Commission in Brussels. Union Syndicale, which is and has been the biggest and dominating union, lost a group of unionists in 1992 that set up Renoveau et Démocratie. SFIE has lost members that set up both SFE and TAO/AFI. TAO/AFI was established in 1987. SFE was set up in 1988, according to Stevens and Stevens (2001:60). FFPE is the only one of the older staff unions that has not been split up, at least not in Brussels.

The reasons behind the splits in the original unions are somewhat unclear, but some indications have been given in the interviews. TAO/AFI claims that the reason behind establishing the staff union was that all the other unions had political links, but TAO/AFI wanted to establish a union without political links (Interview). Other trade unionists, on the other hand, have claimed that TAO/AFI is politically connected to the extreme right, and not without political links (Interview). TAO/AFI claims that another reason behind the establishment of TAO/AFI was the impression of the dominating union, US, having a too close relationship to socialists in the College of
Commissioners, among them Jacques Delors (Interview). The reasons behind the establishment of SFE are unclear. Both SFE and SFIE are staff unions with a Christian inspiration, but they may have some differences in political sympathies. Unlike SFIE, SFE has established a tradition for working quite closely with US, and it therefore seems naturally to assume that this was one of the reasons behind the establishment of SFE. Another difference between SFE and SFIE could be that the former is more concerned with being responsible and less militant than the latter, but this is a contested opinion\textsuperscript{20}. The main purpose for the establishment of R&D in 1992 is claimed to be a disagreement on how the contact with the employer should be (Interview). Stevens and Stevens (2001:60) argue that US was dominated by people linked to the Belgian Socialist Party and freemasons in the late 90s. This might have been another reason behind setting up R&D. The break-outs from US did not have an incompatible political sympathy (Interview), but R&D has later earned a political status as more left-wing than US.

A common reason behind the establishment of TAO/AFI, SFE and R&D, is that it was quite easy at the time to set up a new union, get funding from the Commission and status as a representative union. This argument was in particular pointed out by the official from the Commission (Interview). However, the rules changed with the new framework agreement in 2001. This sets a tougher standard for the staff unions, and that could have implications for the future landscape of staff unions. Under the old framework agreement a staff union only needed one seat in one of the Local Staff Committees, and to have signed the framework agreement to become recognised as a representative union. This status also provided for some resources from the Commission to run the staff union. Under the new agreement the staff unions needs to have at least 1000 members and at least 10% of the votes in one of the Local Staff Committees to become recognised as a representative union, and thereby to be entitled to these resources from the Commission (Interview).

\textsuperscript{20} SFE at least claimed that this was one of the features separating them from the other staff unions, and thereby also from SFIE. SFE also showed a greater will to compromise together with US, than the other staff unions in negotiations on the
One obvious change that already has come about is the formation of the Alliance of Free Trade Unions, which is a federation of several staff unions. Two reasons behind forming the Alliance have been expressed by its members; first of all, to unite staff unions that opposed the administrative reform to such a degree that they broke out of the negotiations on the reform, and secondly, to ensure that the smaller staff unions are not excluded from the concertation (Interview). The latter point directly relates to the framework agreement, as the Alliance as a whole can fulfil the requirements to become recognised as a representative staff union, and thereby protect the smaller staff unions. It is, as of yet, very uncertain what the future of the Alliance will be, but it can develop further, beyond a one-case organisation. The Alliance and its importance will be further discussed later on in this chapter.

4.2.2 Universe of staff unions in EU Institutions
The universe of staff unions refers to the total number of staff unions organising EU employees. This is, as mentioned in chapter one, partly unknown. It could, nevertheless, be interesting to give a short description of the other staff unions that I have come across. Besides the six staff unions in my study, there are at least these seven other staff unions: Action et Défense (AD), Action Indépendent (AI), Le liste Arc en Ciel, Solidarite Européen (SE), Comite du Personnel du Parlament, Syndicat général du personnel des organisations européennes (SGPOE) and Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL)\textsuperscript{21}. AD and CISL are the only of these staff unions that organise Commission employees. AD organises Commission employees in Luxemburg and Brussels, while CISL organises Commission employees in Ispra, the joint research centre in Italy. It might seem natural to include AD in the study as it organises Commission employees in Brussels. It has, nevertheless, been excluded because it currently holds no seats in the Commission’s Local Staff Committee in Brussels, and it did not participate in concertation negotiations on the administrative reform, at least not in the Commission in Brussels. The general impression, therefore,

\textsuperscript{21} This is the Italian name and abbreviation. The French or English name(s) are not known.
is that AD currently is a rather small and unimportant staff union here\textsuperscript{22}. AI organises employees of the European Court of Justice in Luxemburg, while the others organise employees of the European Parliament in Brussels, Luxemburg and Strasbourg. The sizes of these staff unions are uncertain, but given that they organise employees of smaller institutions, it is logical to assume that they are smaller than the biggest staff unions examined in this thesis\textsuperscript{23}.

All of the unions mentioned above, except CISL, are, together with four of the unions in this study, R&D, FFPE, SFIE and TAO/AFI, united in the Alliance of Free Trade Unions. If the Alliance evolves into one staff union federation, the number of staff unions in the European institutions would therefore fall considerably, and probably reach a level of a handful of unions or union federations, where the Alliance and US would dominate.

4.3 Political sympathies in the staff unions

All of the six staff unions claim to be politically independent, but in general, it seems they are composed of members that share a common political view. Stevens and Stevens (2001:59) also emphasise a division between the staff unions along political lines. As none of the unions have official links to political parties, and as they in general are competing for the organisation of the same members, it seems natural that they all claim to be open to anyone and politically independent. The nature of unionism, however, is so closely connected to politics that it seems impossible to be totally politically independent. To be independent from a political party is, however, both possible and in this case also the case. The important question might therefore be to what extent a political ideology, understood as more general political values than ties to a political party, exists in the different staff unions. Ideology could, like political parties, be measured through a placement on a traditional left-right scale, but the dominance of an ideology in any given staff union is much harder to measure.

\textsuperscript{22} In the Commission in Brussels, AD is marginal in size, with only 166 votes on its list in the 2002 elections to Local Staff Committee, and it seems that the elections in 2002 were the first in the Commission in Brussels for AD.
The unions do in general also share some common values. They all fight for a strong and independent civil service, and the Commission as the most important actor in European integration. This is of course connected to securing the jobs and status of their members, but there are also other implications of the statement. These will be examined in section 4.3.2. These values could also be understood as part of the political ideology of each staff union, but it seems that there are no differences between them on this issue.

4.3.1 Left-right differences
Starting from the left, it seems reasonable to place the unions in this order on a traditional left-right axis: R&D, US, SFE, SFIE, FFPE and TAO/AFI. R&D is considered to be dominated by left and extreme left elements. It is a young union that claims to be modern, and the traditional left-right division is largely dismissed as out-of-date (Interview). US has always been associated with the socialist or moderate left (Interview; Stevens and Stevens 2001:60). SFE and SFIE both share a Christian-democratic political sympathy. One can argue that SFE comes further to the left than SFIE because of its co-operation with US. SFE is, because of this co-operation, considered by some of the other staff unions as not much more than a branch of US. There is, however, no empirical evidence supporting such a view from either SFE or US. FFPE is considered to be somewhere between liberals and conservatives (Interview), but was described by Stevens and Stevens (2001:60) as less politically aligned. FFPE claims to be truly apolitical, and to be more occupied with the protection of a strong, permanent and independent civil service than the other unions (Interview). TAO/AFI is considered by the other staff unions to be sympathetic towards the right and extreme right (Interview). On the other hand, TAO/AFI

---

23 According to Stevens and Stevens (2001:16), the total number of staff in the European Parliament (including Ombudsman) is 4102, while the same number for the European Court of Justice is 961. The total number of staff in the Commission is 20913 (Ibid).

24 In the reform work the Alliance staff unions described US as the only staff union negotiating with the administration of the Commission (Interview).
themselves claim to be politically independent, and that its independence was the primary reason behind founding the union.

The interviews and other data found on the staff unions are unfortunately not revealing much information about how strong these political sympathies or links are for the different unions. The support and importance of political views for the members is not revealed either. It is therefore not easy to conclude with anything else than the general remarks on the political sympathies of each union given above. The importance of these sympathies or links is somewhat ambiguous. On one hand, it might tell us something about the values dominating inside each union. On the other hand, the unions’ work is to a smaller and larger degree political. The staff representation was considered more practical and less political than the concertation process by several of the unionists (Interview).

The formation of the Alliance has put together R&D, FFPE, SFIE and TAO/AFI as well as several staff unions outside the Commission in Brussels. This means that the political values within the Alliance stretches from the extreme left to the extreme right. If the different unions manage to make this alliance into something more than a common view on the reform and a way of securing representation for the smaller unions, then political sympathies obviously does not matter very much for the work that the unions perform. The Alliance has, so far, not become anything much more than a one case organisation, and this is quite common among rather different political parties as well, without any questioning of the importance of political ideology. However, the members of the Alliance did use their common position in the elections to Local Staff Committees in December 2002 (EuReforme 2002), and they formed a majority together in the Local Staff Committee in Brussels after the elections. This could be understood as going beyond the loose network against the reform, but one must remember that the reform is by far the most important issue for the staff unions and will continue to be so, until it is fully implemented. Indicators
from R&D and TAO/AFI, which compose the biggest political difference\(^{25}\), seem to be that a development of the Alliance into a staff unions’ confederation is unlikely, at least with all its current members. The future of the Alliance will probably not be known until the reform process is completed. Until then, the unions in the Alliance have a tie that holds them together and perhaps more important, they do not have time or resources to review their partnership.

4.3.2 Common political opinions
Regardless of their placement on a traditional left right scale, the staff unions also share some political opinions. One common denominator among all the unions seems to be the principle of a strong, permanent and independent European civil service. This principle includes salary and pensions issues and a fight against the contracting out of tasks, but it also goes beyond these traditional trade union issues. It includes the view that the Commission and its staff have played an important role in the European integration and that the staff will be crucial to the European integration in the future as well. The Commission is seen as the main engine behind European integration also in the future, and the staff unions appear to strongly favour increased integration. More resources should be given to strengthen the Commission because of the Commission’s important role. This is seen as a precondition to further integration, because the system is currently overloaded. Another point, stressed by all of the staff unions, is to secure that the working conditions for staff are good enough to attract the best qualified personnel from all the member states. In order to achieve the best possible recruitment, they argue that the working conditions need to be attractive for personnel from the wealthiest member states as well (Interview). One interesting aspect with this argument is the focus on nationality. In most other regards, the staff unions are not particularly concerned with nationality, but when it comes to recruitment, nationality is considered vital. Avoidance of national influence in the Commission system is another shared view. An interesting point is that the staff unions reacted differently to the administrative reform, but they based parts of their arguments on these principles and values they have in common.

\(^{25}\) It is at least the biggest difference among the staff unions studied here.
It is, perhaps, not very surprising that the staff unions favour the values mentioned above, as they, and their members, have strong interests in the matters. The emphasis on further integration and a stronger role for the Commission could be understood as political views, but it could hardly be understood as something that goes beyond the staff unions’ self-interests. Nevertheless, staff unions are not the only political actors that have their political views shaped by self-interests, and it seems like the political views also are shaped by political ideologies.

4.4 Organisational aspects
There are several ways of building up an organisation, and the staff unions have chosen somewhat different solutions. These differences relate to the internal and the external structure, as well as other aspects of the organisation. In this section both the broad tendencies and the different staff unions will be described.

4.4.1 Internal structure
The internal structure describes how the staff union is organised internally. First of all, the internal bodies within a staff union or a section of a staff union are described. The examined staff unions differ in size and some of them are specialised into several sections with a federal level on top. In the staff unions with several sections or levels, the Commission section or the Brussels section is examined in this thesis. Some points on the reminding structure of the organisation are also made. Furthermore, the internal organisation is also about the persons filling the bodies and performing the work. The division of roles between key persons inside the staff unions is therefore examined.

The internal bodies in the staff unions seem to be quite similar, even though the names sometimes differ. This is perhaps no big surprise as it follows the lines of most democratic organisations. The highest ranking body is a general assembly or meeting that is held every year or every two years. All members are invited to participate here, and the main responsibility is to deal with important issues, to set the long term course of the staff union and to elect representatives to the other bodies in the union.
The general meeting can also be convened extraordinary in special cases. Such a case might be whether the staff union should participate in a strike. There are rather small executive units that take care of the day to day running of the unions. The most important tasks in the daily business of the staff unions are preparation and participation in staff representation, membership services and drafting of policy proposals. Financial control is normally taken care of by a unit in charge of auditing, while most of the staff unions also have a unit for disciplinary cases. Disciplinary bodies are normally dealing with matters of expulsion or cases where members disagree with their leadership. Membership in these two latter bodies cannot be combined with membership in the executive unit.

The larger staff unions have a central or federal structure of some sort. The federal structure implies some sort of specialisation. Specialisation of staff unions only apply to the staff unions that are organising staff from more than one institution or more than one location. Different sections or branches are set up according to institution, location or a combination of these two. The relationship between the different sections and levels is organised differently among the staff unions. The differences especially relate to the importance of the federal level.

US is specialised by location. This means that there is a Brussels section of US, and that this is responsible for all the staff in Brussels regardless of which institution they work in. This way of organising sections could create some problems as the employees in each of the institutions might have different perceptions of what is in their best interest. On the other hand, it might be even more likely that the differences are just as big or bigger within a large institution like the Commission, as between the institutions. The other and smaller institutions might even have a more unified staff than the Commission. The Brussels section has got sub-units in the different institutions, but most of the work and decisions are brought up to the Brussels section level. The executive committee of the Brussels section is composed of members from the different EU institutions in Brussels, and the number from each institution is linked to the size of that institution. This means that the Commission representatives
are by far the biggest group in the executive committee for Brussels\textsuperscript{26}. It is also interesting to note that the rules of US limit the number of representatives from one nationality. Of the 26 representatives in the executive committee, only 10 may be of the same nationality. Additionally, it is stated that no nationality may have an absolute majority among the members of any institution (Union Syndicale 2002). According to a representative of US, most of the members agree in all cases. As an example, he claimed that there was never any voting in the executive committee during the whole negotiation process on the reform. In cases where there are disagreements about what policy to pursue, it is not running along the institutional division (Interview). Union Syndicale has also got a federal level above the Brussels’ section and the other local sections. The federal level is most important for ensuring coherence, but also bigger issues that affect all of the employees are discussed here. The biggest sections like Brussels, Luxemburg and Ispra are also the most important ones at the federal level (Interview).

FFPE is another federal staff union, with branches in many of the institutions and locations. Unlike US, FFPE is mainly divided between the institutions and locations at the federal level. This means that there are sections for each institution in every location. Practically, this implies that in Brussels there are sections for several institutions. There are as many as eight separate sections within the Commission spread around eight locations. The sections have their own General Assembly and they elect a Committee that is in charge of daily running of the section. Each Committee sends two representatives to the Council at the federal level, which is in charge of the election of the Bureau. The Bureau is the executive unit at the federal level. Here, all the decisions that regard the federal level are taken (Interview). One could question whether this implies that the federal level in FFPE is more important than the federal level in US. It was, however, mentioned that the section of the Commission in Brussels had two seats in the Bureau, unlike the other sections. In addition, the representatives from this section normally get leading positions in the

\textsuperscript{26} The Commission has 13 of 26 representatives in the executive committee (Union Syndicale 2002).
Bureau. The argument behind favouring the section was that it contributed with more money at the federal level than the other sections, due to more members (Interview).

SFIE is organised into different sections, but whether they follow institution or location seem to be random. The Brussels section is currently organising Commission employees only. The other sections of SFIE are Luxemburg, European Schools, European Parliament, and a for the moment non-active Council section (Interview). Above all the sections, there is a central (federal) level, where all the sections are treated as equals. The central level is mainly responsible for co-ordination, but all important matters are normally brought to the central level. It was claimed that it can be hard to come to an agreement at the central level because of different perceptions in the different sections. The disagreement could be explained by the fact that there are mostly C grades working in the Council and European Parliament while there are A grades working in the Commission (Interview).

TAO/AFI has Commission employees as their member, but some of these are located in Ispra and Seville, and not in Brussels. However, this has not, so far, led to any specialisation of the organisation, probably because of TAO/AFI’s rather small size.

R&D claims to be growing as a staff union, but initially it was only a staff union for employees of the Commission in Brussels. R&D is starting up a section in the Council and in the Commission’s location Alicante. Apart from this, R&D works together with FFPE at Ispra, the joint research centre. It seems that R&D has not clarified what kind of federal structure it will adopt yet.

SFE has currently only one section, and claims to have specialised itself on the Commission in Brussels. SFE is, nevertheless open for members from other institutions and locations. However, SFE is a member of La Confederation Syndicale Européenne, or the Confederation as it is known in English. It consists of three staff
unions from the European institutions\textsuperscript{27}. The importance of the Confederation was not clarified during the interviews, but it seems that the Confederation could be compared to the federal structure found in some of the other staff unions. The division of responsibilities between the Confederation and its members is unclear, but interview data indicate that SFE has independent powers. It could therefore be assumed that the Confederation’s main purpose is co-ordination and co-operation between the members. One important aspect is that Solidarite Européen (SE), one of the other members of the Confederation, is also a member of the Alliance, while the two other members of the Confederation are not members of the Alliance. This indicates that the importance of the Confederation at best is limited. SFE is the only staff union in this confederation that organises employees of the Commission in Brussels. Both the Confederation and SFE have been signatories in various documents. In these cases, I have chosen to refer to SFE, as it is the Commission in Brussels branch within the Confederation.

The most important implication of dividing a staff union into different sections or levels is that the staff of different institutions might have different interests. This would lead to tensions within staff unions that organise employees from different institutions or locations. On the other hand, measured in total number of members, the larger a staff union is the more influence it is likely to have. Are there any indications of tension within the staff unions which organise employees from different institutions or locations? As mentioned above, US claimed that tensions inside the union would rather run along other lines than the institutional. It is interesting to note that SFIE, unlike US, claims that there is disagreement at the federal level. A source from DG Personnel and Administration in the Commission claimed that there were substantial differences among staff unions from the different institutions. His perception was that in other institutions than the Commission, the administration of the institution and the staff unions are helping each other, which leads to promotions for the unionists and less disturbances for the administration. This was also the case in the Commission 15 years ago (Interview).

\textsuperscript{27} The two other staff unions are Solidarité Européenne (SE) and Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL).
In the executive units within the staff unions, there are some key persons that are either part-time or full-time unionists. The number depends on the size of the union and on each section in a federal staff union. The smaller staff unions like TAO/AFI, SFIE and SFE have got two or three such key-persons, and not all of them are full-time. In the larger staff unions it can be a few more key-persons, but in general, there are not many full-time unionists here either. The most important roles inside the sections are the President or the Secretary General, and the Political Secretary. These titles are common in all the staff unions, and the persons filling these roles are normally detached. This means that they are full time or almost full time unionists. Additionally, there are normally also staff representation tasks connected to the detachments, and the time can therefore not be used solely on union business. The division between these two types of work will be elaborated on in section 4.9. There is also some auxiliary staff to help the key-persons in each staff union, but it is not common to have more than one or two secretaries for the whole section. Apart from these secretaries the other personnel in the staff unions are elected among the members at the general meeting, and thereby recruited internally. According to the unionists, much of the work is done voluntarily in the members’ spare time (Interview).

4.4.2 External structure

The external structure is understood as the relationship between the staff unions and other sections of staff unions, as well as relationship between the staff unions and national or international trade union confederations. This external structure is closely connected to the working methods of the staff unions, described below, but the focus here is on a more formalised relationship.

The relationship between the staff unions is in general dominated by competition. However, as mentioned, the staff unions have been divided into two camps. Inside the Alliance, the cooperation is quite close, at least as long as the reform process is ongoing. The relationship between the Alliance’s members after the reform is, as mentioned, uncertain, but the degree of co-operation at this stage clearly indicates
that there is an external structure between these staff unions. The relationship between US and SFE is less clear, and it is not stated as any official link from either of these staff unions. Other unionists have claimed that the link between these two unions is quite strong, and have come close to regarding SFE as a sub-section of US (Interview). There are also some recent examples of a common staff union position. In the spring of 2003 all the six staff unions were participating in two strikes, opposing the Commission’s negotiations with the Council on the reform. These negotiations also opened for a reform of the staff’s pensions, and it seemed that all the staff unions shared a common negative position in this case. It is, however, too early to say whether there will be a common position in negotiations on pensions.

Relationship with other trade union confederations implies that even though these staff unions are small in the total number of members compared to national trade unions, they are accepted as members in international confederations. The international affiliation also implies that the staff unions have an alternative approach in their work to defend the rights and interests of their members. Instead of, or together with, the direct contact with the Commission, the staff unions can use international federations to work their cases. This possibility runs along one of the central arguments in the multi level governance perspective.

US, FFPE, SFIE and TAO/AFI are all affiliated to other trade union organisations, while only R&D and SFE are without such international contact. It does not seem that the Confederation, of which SFE is a member, has any international trade union affiliation either. According to US (2004), the federal level of US is affiliated to Public Services International, European Federation of Public Services Unions, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), and International Federation of Free Trade Unions. FFPE (2004) was among the founding unions of the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions. SFIE and TAO/AFI are both affiliated to World Confederation of Labour (Interview). Even though four of the staff unions are affiliated to international trade union confederations, there are few indications of them using this channel to defend the rights and interests of their members.
(Interview). This could be connected to the fact that the staff unions are very small when compared to national trade unions, and that their influence or importance in the confederations therefore is likely to be limited. Another argument is that these staff unions have relatively good access to the Commission, and that this direct channel could be seen as more effective.

4.5 Resources
The data collection did not go into any details of the size of each staff unions’ resources. This section therefore only provides some general remarks on this matter. Resources are understood as both financial and knowledge-based ones. The financial resources are mainly membership fees and transfer from the Commission. The transfer from the Commission is linked to the election results in the Local Staff Committee and participation in the concertation process. The staff unions receive one amount from the Commission, and it must divide it inside the union if it is federal (Interview). As the unionists claim that much of the work is done voluntarily, the resources from the Commission are not very extensive. On the other hand, the resources from the Commission are likely to have been reduced, as this was one of the aims of Neil Kinnock (The Independent 1999). Kinnock, who is one of the vice-presidents in the Commission, is in charge of the administrative reform of the Commission. He claimed that there were too many unionists paid for by the Commission, and that the staff unions were not very representative (Ibid). One important point is that there are currently many staff unions and that as long as they are all recognised as representative, they are all entitled to resources from the Commission. If the number of staff unions decrease with the new framework agreement, so the resources for the surviving staff unions could increase. On the other hand, one of the aims behind the reform of the Commission is to make savings, and increased resources are therefore not very probable.

It is likely that there are differences among the staff unions regarding their resources. One could be tempted to conclude that US has far more financial resources than the other staff unions, as it is the only staff union with a building of its own. US is,
however, the largest of the staff unions and therefore it also gets more in membership fee than the other staff unions.

The knowledge-based resources, or human resources, are the unionists and their work. There are no indications on important differences between the staff unions in this regard, but it is worth noticing that most of the work in the staff unions is performed by Commission officials, in the capacity of union representatives. There are in other words little expertise hired in from the outside, and parts of the work seem to be done on a voluntary basis. According to a representative from the Commission’s side, the average unionist serves a rather long term within the organisation (Interview). The longer the unionists serve the more experience they will gain. This, in turn, leads to higher knowledge-based resources in the organisation. Internal recruitment of unionists ensures vital understanding of and experience with EU. Thus, it strengthens the human resources.

4.6 Membership and support
All of the staff unions have rules that open up for members from all nationalities and all grades. In general, all officials, employees and retired staff of European institutions may apply for membership, and these requirements are common for all the six staff unions (Interview). There are three categories that membership can be reviewed along: Nationality, grade and the proportion of members among staff. The staff unions also attract support from non-unionised staff, and this support will be examined together with their membership basis. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the staff unions regarded much of this information as sensitive, and the data that this analysis rests on therefore are of a varying quality. There have, however, been indications by others regarding some of these questions. It is, in particular, the number of members and thereby the proportion of membership that has been discussed previously.

4.6.1 Nationality
There are some differences in the nationality of the members of the six staff unions examined. US claims to be fairly evenly divided in regards to nationality, but it is
acknowledged that there are fewer Scandinavian members. This applies in general to all the staff unions. TAO/AFI has most members from Italy, Belgium and Great Britain. It claims that it is harder to attract members from the Nordic countries and Germany. FFPE have traditionally been linked to German, Dutch and Belgian nationalities, but also other North-European nationalities are frequent members. This is rather unique for FFPE. R&D, SFE and SFIE gave only some general remarks on nationality in the staff unions. There seems to be a common position that Italian, Belgian and French have been the dominating nationalities, generally followed by South-Europeans. In this regard, the high frequency of Northern-Europeans in FFPE is an exception. There are no clear explanations to why certain nationalities are more or less represented in staff union membership. The high frequency of Belgians could perhaps be explained by general high number of Belgians working in the Commission in Brussels, especially in the B, C and D grades. There could also be other explanations connected to nationality, like the national tradition of unionism and compatibility between these traditions and the EU staff unions. Another explanation might be differences in lengths of service between the nationalities. Finally, differences in the level of membership in domestic trade unions could be part of the explanation. However, US (2002) and R&D (2004) open for a double membership in their rules, as long as the domestic trade union does not organise members at the European level, and that their objectives or ideology is similar. However, all of these ideas are only speculations, as the empirical analysis did not reveal any explanations.

4.6.2 Grade
The system with A, B, C and D grades is, as mentioned, about to be changed into a system of only two grades, but the old system was still in place when these data were collected. All the staff unions are open for all the grades, and they are all anxious to stress that it is not considered important what grade their members have. US claims that their members are rather evenly divided among the four grades, but some of the other staff unions have claimed that there are many A grade members in US (Interview). R&D claims to have quite a lot of A grade members as well as B grade members. FFPE also claims more A and B grades than C and D grades. In SFE the proportions of members in the different grades are: 15% A, 20% B, 55% C and 10%
D. There are in other words a large majority of C grade members. SFIE claims to have many B and C grade members. TAO/AFI follows the same line with more B and C grade members. It also added that, at least until the reform, it was harder to recruit A grade members (Interview). This opinion was sheared by SFE, who felt that administrative officials were less concerned with unionism (Interview). There are no clearly stated intentions of recruiting members from just one of the grades, but there still are some differences among the staff unions in the membership profile.

4.6.3 Number of members
Even though this information is considered sensitive, the staff unions did provide at least some rough estimates at the number of members. It was made quite clear that US is by far the biggest staff union, also when it comes to the number of members. The other estimates or indications that were given are less conclusive. One source claimed that US has about 4000 members, but this has not been confirmed by any of their officials. FFPE and R&D both claim to have above the 1000 members needed to be recognised as a representative staff union, but they did not provide any detailed numbers. SFE estimates that it has around the required 1000 members. TAO/AFI claimed to have around 500 members, and SFIE would not reveal any information on the number of members at all.

4.6.4 Non-member support
Elections to staff representation and labour actions are two typical occasions where staff unions attract support from non-unionised staff. Neither of these two necessarily depends on staff unions. Staff representation goes further back than the staff unions, and in the beginning the staff representatives were elected without any union behind them. It seems that most labour actions stem from a General Meeting of Staff. The staff unions dominate these meetings today, but the meetings in themselves are not dependent on the staff unions. The support of the staff unions in staff elections and labour action could be understood as weak, voluntary, and rather passive support of the different staff unions. Nevertheless, it is a support in favour of one or more of them.
In the elections to Local Staff Committees it is almost exclusively staff union representatives or staff unions’ lists that are nominated as candidates. The number of staff voting on a staff union in the Local Staff Committee elections is far higher than the staff union’s members. In the 2002 elections to Local Staff Committee in Brussels the total number of votes was 11774. This was marginally above two-thirds of the electorate of 17313 persons (Bureau Electoral 2002). A quorum of two-thirds of the electorate is needed for the election to be valid. The two-thirds quorum is a rather strict limit, but it seems that the quorum is almost always reached. Higher support in elections than in number of members implies that all staff unions receive support from others than their paying members. This support is quite important because election results counts both to become recognised as representative, and in receiving resources from the Commission. Another important point is that the elections thereby take the competition between the staff unions to a tougher level, as not only potential members, but also potential votes are fought over. The division of the 27 seats in the Brussels Local Staff Committee is after elections in December 2002: US 9, R&D 8, FFPE 3, TAO/AFI 3, and SFE and SFIE 2 each (Ibid). The members of the Alliance got a majority of 16 representatives against the 11 representatives of US and SFE. US and SFE held the majority in this committee before the last election, and the Alliance was therefore pleased with the results (FFPE 2002a). Action et Défense was also represented with a list in the 2002 elections, but it failed to obtain a seat in the Local Staff Committee.

The staff unions also attract support to their labour actions from non-unionised staff. It could be questioned if the staff unions are formally in charge of labour actions, as these normally stem from a General Meeting of Staff. The General Meetings are, however, normally dominated by the staff unions, and in recent examples of strikes the staff unions have been united behind the actions. This was the case in the two strikes during the spring 2003 (Renouveau et Démocratie 2003 and Union Syndicale 2003a). The staff unions seem to have massive support among staff when they go to

---

28 The European Voice reported that it was unprecedented when the staff elections in the European Parliament did not reach the needed two-thirds of the electorate (3rd July 1997). It seems reasonable to expect that staff elections in the Commission
trades. Michelle Cini (2001:8) reported that more than 90 percent of the Commission’s staff participated in a strike against the reform proposal in 1998. Strikes performed in the spring 2003 against changes in the pensions also seemed to have high support according to the staff unions (Union Syndicale 2003b and 2003c). European Voice (2003) claimed that the strike 20th May paralysed EU institutions. The support in strikes might, however, be closely connected to what is at stake, and whether all staff unions support the strike or not.

4.6.5 Proportion of members and general support

The proportion of staff union members among the staff of the Commission is interesting because it reveals information on how representative the unions are. A rough estimate of the total number of members from all the six staff unions would be 8000 or less29. This would be a rather high number if it was in the Commission in Brussels only, but it includes also other institutions and locations. The lack of data makes it impossible to estimate the total number of members in the Commission in Brussels and the proportion of members there. Likewise, there are no data on the number of members from other staff unions, and therefore it is not possible to estimate the total number of members or the proportion of members in all of the institutions. A staff representative is quoted in House of Lords (1988: 118) assessing the proportion of members in the Commission to be one third. According to Stevens and Stevens (2001:61), the Commission claimed in 1999 that somewhere between 18 and 35 percent of staff were staff union members. The Independent (1999) assessed that in 1999 the staff unions represented 40 percent of a total number of 16000 staff in the Commission. Another figure is given by Cini (2001:7-8), who claims that the proportion of staff union members in the Commission is around 20%.

Even with these various views: The membership level is limited, and certainly below 50 percent. Whether this is a high or low level depends on what it is held against. There are probably large differences in the level of trade union membership among

---

29 This number is based on the numbers above, and assumes that SFIE has 500 members, and that FFPE, R&D, and SFE have 1000 members.
employees of the different national governmental institutions, without this point being further examined in this thesis. At first, one might assume that the staff unions could not be very representative with such low membership numbers. This might be true in the concertation process of negotiations with the administration, where the staff unions are representing their members only. It is, nevertheless, not necessarily true in the staff representation because the representatives of staff are elected by all members of staff, and there are, as mentioned above more voters than staff union members. In this regard, it would seem natural to compare the staff unions to political parties. Somewhere between 20 and 40 percent of all staff would be a rather high proportion of members compared to political parties in most of the member states. Both the general support in strikes and the electoral results are indicating popular support in the staff unions, but could this be counted as part of being representative? It might not hold true in a narrow understanding of the term, but it certainly could have implications for the staff unions’ general influence both in the staff representation and in the concertation. However, the argument can be turned around. The staff unions are made dependent on support from non-unionised staff to secure resources from the Commission and influence. Such a reliance on non-members can lead to less attention to the members, which, in turn, might further reduce the number of members and weaken the unions.

4.7 Scope of staff unions’ work
The staff unions’ scope or mission could be understood as how they work, but the focus here will primarily be connected to what the staff unions work with, and not how they work. To what degree are the unions only working with staff representation and influencing policies of the Commission? There are at least two categories that fall outside staff representation and influencing the Commission. First of all, there are some services that perhaps not inevitably are associated with staff union work, but that have traditionally been among the important reasons behind the founding of staff unions. All the staff unions provide services to their members that can be included into the protection of members’ rights and interests. The services include legal and financial advice, training and education, general information on matters that might
interest the members, providing answers and advice to questions connected to working conditions, and also some social activities. In addition, these services seem to be similar in all the staff unions and provided by all of them as well. All the staff unions except SFIE and TAO/AFI are distributing their own magazines as well.

Secondly, some of the staff unions are focusing on other issues as well. However, there are some differences between the staff unions in this respect. Some of them have a much wider, community-oriented scope, while others have a more narrow focus on the protection of their members’ rights and interests. R&D placed itself among the staff unions with the community-oriented view. It was involved in several different cases that had little or no connection to their role as a staff union. One example could be women’s rights in development countries, another, the fight against a war in Iraq. R&D claimed that their commitment was a natural implication of their members working in political institutions, and thereby having an interest in politics (Interview). One of the aims, stated in the rules of R&D, is to achieve a more egalitarian and fairer society (R&D 2004), and this could exemplify this staff union’s scope. In the other end of the scale is FFPE and TAO/AFI. FFPE has as its only purpose to fight for a strong, permanent and independent civil service, and other cases are not emphasised as staff union business (Interview). There is a small exception regarding social policy, where FFPE states that it wants to act as a catalyst spreading knowledge on social policy (FFPE 2002b). TAO/AFI is putting emphasis on objectives directly connected to the rights and interests of staff (Interview), and thereby seems to have a rather narrow scope. The four other staff unions are somewhere between these positions. SFE wants to contribute to the development of a trade union movement inspired by Christian values, from the national to the global level (Interview). Most of the staff unions found it extremely hard to spend time and resources on other issues as long as the administrative reform was ongoing. SFIE was among the staff unions advocating such a view, without giving a further description of what cases they would like to work on if they had time and resources (Interview). US claimed that they were also working on issues like research policy, the
enlargement of EU, EU citizenship, and bringing the EU institutions closer to the people (Interview).

4.8 Differences and similarities among the unions
The differences and similarities among the staff unions in the study can be used to round up the description of the six staff unions. The most obvious differences and similarities among the staff unions have already been introduced in the sections above. There are differences and similarities in most of the aspects the staff unions have been described along. The task here, therefore, will be to point towards the overall picture.

4.8.1 Political sympathies
It seemed that the best way of separating the staff unions is along the line of political sympathies. A small exception must be made for the difference between SFIE and SFE. The practical importance of the different political sympathies seems unclear, as the Alliance staff unions are including staff unions from the extreme left to the extreme right. This leads to an assumption of political sympathies as more of a common background among the unionists than a governing norm inside each staff union. Parts of these sympathies, namely the principle of a strong, independent and permanent European civil service, seem to be one important objective that all the staff unions have in common. Furthermore, it seems like this, to some extent, goes beyond a narrow understanding of defending the members’ rights and interests, and it therefore becomes more of a political opinion.

4.8.2 Organisation
The organisational structures of the six unions have got both similarities and differences. The internal composition of the six staff unions is almost the same. The internal bodies fall along the lines of other democratic organisations. The organisational differences are connected to the size of the organisation. The larger staff unions have a federal structure and are specialised according to locations, institutions, or a combination of these. Furthermore, there are also some differences in the importance of the federal level and thereby the independence of the local
sections. Four of the six staff unions are affiliated to international trade union federations, but it does not seem very important to them.

4.8.3 Membership basis
The empirical analysis revealed that the six organisations recruit somewhat different members both regarding nationality and grade. The differences are not strong enough to support the idea that some of the staff unions are composed of members from just one nationality or just one grade. There seems to be some patterns regarding the nationality of the staff unions’ members. There are, in general, fewer members from Scandinavia than from the other nationalities. In the other end of this scale are Italians, Belgians and French. There is no clear pattern regarding the members’ grades. All of the staff unions examined has got members from all of the four grades, but the proportions of each grade are not the same among the staff unions. It seemed that R&D and FFPE have the highest proportion of A grade members, while SFE has a high proportion of C members. SFIE and TAO/AFI claimed many B and C members, while US claimed rather even proportions. It should, however, be stressed that the data given on membership are, to a large extent, rough estimates.

4.9 Working methods of the staff unions
As mentioned above, the staff unions work with the administration in two different ways. On one hand, they work as staff representatives to ensure that the administration follows the rules set down in the Staff Regulations. On the other, they perform negotiations with the administration whenever new proposals that affect the personnel policy come up. The basis for staff representation is the rules in the Staff Regulations, while the basis for concertation negotiations is the framework agreement between the Commission and the staff unions. According to the staff unions, staff representation is more practically oriented work, while concertation is more politically oriented work (Interview). Staff representation can be described as advice on individual decisions, while concertation can be described as negotiations on broad policy matters. Another important difference is that the staff unions represent all staff in the staff representation, while they are primarily representing their members in
concertation. These two types of working are described below, and the section ends up with a description of the working style of the staff unions.

4.9.1 Staff representation

Staff representation is regulated in the Staff Regulations, and parts of this system have been in place all the way since the European Coal and Steel Community. This representation of staff has precedents in German legislation (House of Lords 1988:90). From the onset there were no staff unions, and the elected representatives had no organisations behind them. The most central body in the system is the Central Staff Committee. In each location of the Commission there is a Local Staff Committee, elected by a General Meeting of staff. The Local Staff Committee elects members to the Central Staff Committee. The tasks of the Central Staff Committee are listed in the Staff Regulations article 9, 3rd paragraph (Commission 2004a):

“The Staff Committee shall represent the interests of the staff vis-à-vis their institution and maintain continuous contact between the institution and the staff. It shall contribute to the smooth running of the service by providing a channel for the expression of opinion by the staff. It shall bring to the notice of the competent bodies of the institution any difficulty having general implications concerning the interpretation and application of these Staff Regulations. It may be consulted on any difficulty of this kind. The Committee shall submit to the competent bodies of the institution suggestions concerning the organisation and operation of the service and proposals for the improvement of staff working conditions or general living conditions. The Committee shall participate in the management and supervision of social welfare bodies set up by the institution in the interests of its staff. It may, with the consent of the institution, set up such welfare services”.

Thus, the Central Staff Committee has a number of tasks and responsibilities connected to the interests of staff. It is to work as a channel, and thereby ensure contact both from staff to the institution and the other way. It is to give advice on the interpretations and application of the Staff Regulation, and thereby the regulation of the working conditions of staff. It is also to give advice on the organisation and operation of the services, which implies the general running of the institution. Finally, it is to participate in the management and supervision of social welfare bodies. This implies that it sends representatives to welfare bodies. Through these tasks, the Central Staff Committee has institutionalised the contact between employees and employer and a principle of industrial democracy.
The Central Staff Committee also sends representatives to the Joint Committee(s)\(^{30}\). The Joint Committee is composed of one half of staff representatives and one half of representatives from the administration of the institution, in our case the Commission. The representatives from the Commission are mostly from DG Personnel and Administration, as this is a part of the Commission’s personnel policy. There is also a chairman appointed by the institution, but he or she may only vote on questions on procedure (Commission 2004a: Staff Regulations Annex II article 3). The role of the Joint Committee is to give consultative advice on questions of staff management (Commission 2004a, Staff Regulations article 9, 4\(^{th}\) paragraph). Examples of what the Joint Committee gives advice on include the terms of notice for competition for recruitment and the terms of vacancy notices (House of Lords 1988:91). In matters of recruitment, a Joint Committee is set up that acts like a jury. It examines the candidates, and draws up a list over candidates that have passed the competition. The administration then chooses a candidate from this list (Ibid 92).

Staff is also represented in the Disciplinary Board, which deals with disciplinary cases in the Commission. Besides these committees, staff is also represented in the Promotions Committee and the Committee on formation, even though this is not provided for in the Staff Regulations (House of Lords 1988: 91-92). The Promotion Committees gives advice on promotions up to the grade A4, and they are composed like the Joint Committee. The Committee on formation deals with the organisation of training internally in the Commission. All of these committees have in common that they provide advice to the institution, but not decisions. On the other hand, it might be difficult for the institution to constantly disregard the advice (Ibid 1988:90-92). According to article 10a of the Staff Regulations, the institution can act without the advice of the committees, if they fail to give their advice within a limit set by the institution (Commission 2004a).

\(^{30}\) The Staff Regulations, which are valid for all EU institutions, opens for one or more Joint Committees in each institution. Here, it will be described as the Joint Committee, as the tasks of the Committee are the same whether there are one or many Joint Committees.
Today, the staff representation is nearly always performed by members of the different staff unions. This is largely due to the fact that the unions have dominated the General Meeting of Staff which sets down the electoral rules for choosing representatives. The staff regulations provide the General Meeting of Staff in each location of the Commission with wide powers to set down electoral rules for the Local Staff Committee (Commission 2004a: Staff Regulations Annex II). This committee takes care of staff representation in its location and it appoints members for the Central Staff Committee for all Commission employees. The electoral rules in the different locations have varied from proportional to majoritarian systems. This has had implications for the size of the different unions in the different locations (Interview). The Local Staff Committees, like the Central Staff Committee, do not perform a lot of the actual representation, but they are responsible for selecting and sending members to the different joint committees, and ensuring that these members and committees are fulfilling their tasks. It is mostly in the Joint Committee and the other committees like the Committee on formation that the real staff representation occurs.

Even though most of the members elected to these committees are unionists, they are not supposed to represent their union but all staff in the joint committees. It is, however, unclear whether this division of roles is taken into account by the members. It might not be all that important, as the issues debated in these committees are less political and more practical than the unions’ negotiations with the administration. On the other hand, staff representation is important and the elections to the Local Staff Committee are the primary measurement of the competition between the staff unions. The importance is due to the fact that unions or alliances of unions that control the majority of a Local Staff Committee also control which persons should get which positions. The representatives that are chosen for Central Staff Committee are bought free from his or her normal duties to perform staff representation fulltime. This gives a better opportunity to work on unionism as well, and can therefore be considered to increase a union’s total resources.
4.9.2 Consultation process
To be entitled to take part in negotiations with the administration, the 1974 framework agreement required that the union had at least one seat in one Local Staff Committee and that it had signed the agreement. This has made it quite easy to become recognised as a representative union, and it is probably one of the important reasons for the growing number of unions from 1974 till today. In 1974 there were three unions: US, SFE and FFPE. Today there are six unions organising the employees of the Commission only in Brussels and two other staff unions organising Commission employees were identified above. In 2001 the old framework agreement was renewed, and new requirements for being recognised as a representative staff union were set down. To become recognised as representative after the new agreement a staff union need at least 10% of the votes in the elections to any Local Staff Committee and it must have at least 1000 members. This has, at least partly, led to the development of two large blocks of unions: US on the one side and the Alliance on the other side. Disagreement on the ongoing administrative reform of the Commission is, as mentioned, the other important argument behind the development of the two blocks. The change of framework agreement has been important because many of the smaller unions would be erased, and the reform because it made it easier to form alliances.

Negotiations with the Commission are based on the consultation system. The unions that are recognised as representative get to give their opinion on an issue raised by the Commission. However, they only have consultative powers. The Commission is represented in the consultation through DG Personnel and Administration. It is responsible for the contact with the staff unions on behalf of the whole Commission. The negotiations take place on three different levels depending on the issue: The Director level is used to inform about a new issue coming up and give early inputs, while Director-General level is used when the issue is to be decided upon and Commissioner level is used if there is no agreement on the levels below. This means that, in general, the staff unions deal with Commission officials from DG Personnel and Administration. The Commissioner is only involved when agreement cannot be
reached at the lower levels. Additionally, the unions may also demand negotiations to solve problems in the staff representation, for instance with the work of the joint committees (Interview). Even though these negotiations are consultative in a judicial opinion, the staff unions have additional powers if their views are not taken into consideration. Strikes or strike warnings have been effectively used by the staff unions in order to be heard in negotiations. This was the case when the staff unions demanded negotiations on a proposal for changes in staff policy presented in February 2000. Strike warnings led to the creation of a High Level Negotiation Body between the unions and the Commission, and chaired by a neutral broker (Sletnes 2002: 8).

4.9.3 Working-style
The staff representation and the concertation are the formal contact systems for the staff unions. Are there also other patterns of contact? Common for both of staff representation and concertation is that the number of actors is quite limited so there are also informal contacts between the unions and the Commission and in between the different unions (Interview). Furthermore, it has also been indicated that most of the key-persons in each union are serving as unionist for quite long periods, which should contribute to further informal contacts (Interview). Contact between the unions is probably also strengthened by the fact that all the unions except US are located in one building. The negotiations on the reform-package formalised contact between the Alliance staff unions. US and SFE also worked closer together, after the Alliance unions broke out of the negotiations on the reform. They have for instance issued common statements on the reform (SFE 2003a; 2003b; 2003c). It is likely that this cooperation was, at least partly, strategic in order to increase their leverage in the negotiations with the Commission.

The contact between the unions as well as between the unions and the Commission looks very confrontational at first sight. However, according to a source from the Commission, this changes when the actors meet behind closed doors (Interview). Stevens and Stevens (2001:61) also argue that the staff unions generally try to reach a consensus, even though their working style seems to be confrontational in official
statements. An example from the reform process could be given to illustrate this: Until the members of the Alliance broke the negotiations on the reform, agreement had been reached on all issues except the career-structure. The Alliance members could not accept the proposed compromise on career-structure, and therefore ended the negotiations. This story differs from the story the Alliance unions present when they describe the negotiations and the reform in general.

A last aspect connected to the staff unions’ working style is the flexibility. A source within the Commission claimed that the smaller staff unions had often strong leaders that served quite long. This, he claimed, led to changes in the union’s official position based on the personal opinion of a strong leader (Interview). The interviews with unionist and a review of official documents from the staff unions did not indicate this, but the history of the staff unions was not explicitly covered in interviews or other documents. The flexibility of the smaller staff unions, therefore, remains uncertain.

4.10 The staff unions’ influence

The staff unions’ influence is, as mentioned, hard to measure. By using several indicators, some general remarks can hopefully be given. The working methods described in the previous section are clearly linked to the influence, and so are several of the other aspects examined above. In this section different aspects that describe the staff unions’ influence and what affects it, are brought together. In chapter three influence was defined as the staff unions’ ability to shape decision-making in the Commission. This definition opens for influence in both individual decisions and broader policies through respectively the staff representation and the concertation. The main focus here is on influence through the concertation. The staff unions consider the concertation as more important than the staff representation because the concertation has political importance. Still, some points are also made on influence through the staff representation, as this has interesting organisational implications.

4.10.1 Mutual interests with the Commission

One would normally assume that the staff unions and the Commission, in general, have different interests and goals. There are, nevertheless, reasons to question such a
view. It was acknowledged above that the staff unions seem to share a common perception of the Commission as the motor behind European integration. This view is likely to be shared by the administration of the Commission as well. The same goes for the implications of this view; namely that the Commission ought to receive more resources to ensure that it can continue to be the dominant actor in European integration. As long as these values are shared by both the staff unions and the Commission, it could be useful for both parties to highlight the role of the staff unions. If the staff unions appear to be a strong force that the Commission has to take into consideration, the Commission might stand stronger in the decision-making with the other EU institutions. The logic behind this argument follows the same lines as the strengthening of the national level in liberal intergovernmentalism, and it is based on Putnam’s (1988) two level games. It might be questioned whether this could be described as staff unions’ influence, as the influence is due to mutual interests with the Commission. It might still be considered staff unions’ influence, but not influence on the Commission, but on the other EU institutions and the whole of European integration, together with the Commission. In the current situation it would be hard to find any empirical evidence on this kind of co-operation from the administration of the Commission. SFE and US, however, have stressed that negotiating a reform deal with the Commission would ensure a better position before decision-making in the European Parliament and the Council. The Council, in particular, was branded as the employees’ “real” boss, and the toughest opponent of the staff unions (US 2003d, 2003e, 2003f). The two unions’ argument has been that several of the member states are much more critical towards the personnel policy of the Commission, than the administration of the Commission is.

4.10.2 Characteristics of the Commission

One characteristic of the Commission is openness towards input in the policy process. Nugent (2001:244) and Van Schendelen (2002:66-67) both describe the Commission as open for advice and information in decision-making. The reasons behind this openness are the sparse resources of the Commission. Furthermore, openness

---

31 The reform of the Commission has instead put an emphasis on weakening the staff unions. Cf The Independent (1999)
provides a better picture of the position of various other actors. Finally, the Commission might lack expertise on the issues. The latter point is closely connected to the first point, namely that the resources are insufficient to provide the needed information through own or bought expertise. The importance of creating a picture of the various other actors’ positions is connected to the decision-making procedures in the European Parliament and the Council. In the parliament there are, to a large extent, party political positions, while in the Council there are national positions that have to be taken into account. The Commission should, however, ensure the “European” interests, and is therefore open towards interests groups’ positions as well. To the extent that the Commission has an opinion of its own in an issue, all these other positions could be used strategically to come as close as possible to its own position.

This general perception of openness was also expressed by a source within the Commission (Interview). Staff unions that were able to draw up proposals and initiatives were also claimed to be able to influence the Commission. This means that the staff unions’ resources are important for their influence. The skills of the unionists and the time they have available to work on alternative proposals and initiatives are determining their influence to a large extent. This favours the staff unions with the most resources, but not necessarily financial resources. US was considered the only staff unions with the capability to provide proposals and initiatives, by the Commission source (Interview). This was largely explained by US’s size. Therefore, the development of the Alliance can provide for another influential staff union federation.

4.10.3 The case of the administrative reform
Administrative reform of the Commission became a highlighted issue after the Santer Commission had to step down over accusations of fraud and mismanagement in 1999. Reform initiatives already started under the supervision of Commissioner Liikanen in the Santer Commission, but the speed of the reform increased with the
appointment of Neil Kinnock as one of the vice-presidents of the Commission and Commissioner in charge of administrative reform in the Prodi Commission. The administrative reform of the Commission was built around three broad themes: Strategic planning in order to balance better between tasks and resources, overhaul of management and human resources policies, and finally modernisation of the financial management (Commission 2004b). It is particularly the changes in management and human resources that directly affects the staff and thereby the staff unions. The staff unions’ influence on the reform therefore will be measured against this part of the reform.

The administrative reform of the Commission has been among the most important tasks of the Prodi Commission (European Voice 2004). There are several reasons behind the strong emphasis on administrative reform. First, as mentioned above, the Santer Commission was forced to resign over accusations of fraud and mismanagement. This clearly indicates that there was a need for changes. It was also mentioned above that reform efforts were started under the Santer Commission. Thus, it can be argued that there was a need for modernisation of the Commission services. There has been a wave of reform of public sector institutions over the last three decades all over the world, often branded New Public Management. The Commission also experienced changes in this period, but the reforms were rather few and small (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000). Finally, it can be argued that there is a need for institutional reform in the European Union, as 10 new members are joining. This might explain why administrative reform has been important to the Prodi Commission, but it also indicates that reform of the Commission is, and has been, an important issue for the European Union, and thereby the member states.

During the end of 1999 and 2000 a range of new proposals were launched, and a package of concrete proposals of changes in the Human Resources policy of the Commission was adopted in February 2001 (Commission 2002). All six staff unions had been consulted and involved in the development of the reform, but they claimed that there had been no negotiations on the concrete proposals (Union Syndicale
2001). It was particularly the career, salaries and pensions that the staff unions wanted negotiations on. They reacted with protests and strike warnings. The result of this was consultative negotiations from the beginning in a special body, called the High Level Negotiation Body. Only after this achievement, the strike warnings were called off (Commission 2001d). This indicates that the staff unions’ influence was sufficient to ensure new negotiations, even though the administration had not intended for it.

The High Level Negotiation Body started its work in March 2001 with representatives from all the six staff unions in the Commission in Brussels. The negotiations ended in October, but at that time only US and SFE were participating. The Commission (2002:62) was pleased to reach an agreement with at least these two staff unions, and quotes that they represent 59% of staff in the staff committee elections. R&D, FFPE, SFIE and TAO/AFI broke out of the negotiations in the fall 2001, and established the Alliance shortly afterwards. The crucial point was to reach agreement on the career structure, and the unions in the Alliance would not compromise on this point and the negotiations therefore ended (Commission 2001b). Before the negotiations ended, a report was issued from the High Level Negotiation Body on the work performed (Commission 2001a). In this report some recommendations from the members of the body were presented for the Commission. There are examples of both unanimous recommendations and divided recommendations. In annex 1 to this report is it stated that the High Level Negotiation Body “takes the view that measures on staff policy must be subject of concertation with staff representatives” (Commission 2001c:3). This indicates that the staff unions at least had the possibility to let their views be heard in consultative talks with the administration. On the other hand, the focus is on staff policy. The staff unions could therefore not be expected to have influence in other parts of the administrative reform. Niels Ersbøl, the chairman of the High Level Negotiation Body, concluded in October 2001 that both sides were willing to make compromises, and that the Commission’s original proposal had been substantially improved in the
negotiations (Commission 2001b:8). An agreement between the Commission and the staff unions was proposed in order to ensure that decision-making with the Council and the Parliament would not alter the proposals agreed on in the High Level Negotiation Body. New concertation negotiations should follow if decision-making in the Council led to important changes. Such an agreement was signed by the Commission and US and SFE the 30\textsuperscript{th} October 2001.

After the members of the Alliance, had withdrawn from the negotiations they chose to criticise the reform and the negotiations. The reform was accused of destroying the strong and independent European civil service. US and SFE answered by blaming the Alliance for being irresponsible. They claimed that the reform-package would have been a lot worse for the staff if they had not chosen to negotiate with the administration. Some of this must be seen as rhetorical behaviour.

The policies adopted by the Commission, after the negotiations, are twofold. There are policies that can be directly implemented by the Commission, and there are policies, that include changes in EU legislation and therefore must be adopted by the European Parliament and the Council as well. The former ones have in general been implemented by the Commission. The most crucial of the latter ones was changes in the Staff Regulations. A proposal for changes of the Staff Regulations was submitted from the Commission to the Council and the Parliament in April 2002. A compromise with the Council was reached in May 2003 and in June with the Parliament. The common position from the other institutions was the issue of a new round of concertations with the staff unions, and an agreement between the staff unions and the Commission was reached in November 2003 (Commission 2003). The staff unions behind this agreement are US, SFE, and FFPE and R&D (FFPE 2003). The Alliance thereby was divided on the reform issue, as two of the largest members are supporting the agreement, while the other members are rejecting it. The reform issue was one of the important reasons behind establishing the Alliance; this makes the

\footnote{The Commission refers to election results in December 1999, and not the results of the last elections in December 2002.}
internal division more problematic\textsuperscript{33}. The changes to the Staff Regulations are to be implemented by the end of 2004 (Commission 2002).

During decision-making in the Council, questions about changing the system of pensions was also raised. This led to new negotiations between the Commission and the staff unions in order to create a proposal to the Council for changes in the system of pensions. The members of the Alliance have participated in these negotiations and on the implementation of the Council-Commission-agreement. The differences between the staff unions were, in other words, not as big as they may have seemed. It is, as of yet, uncertain how the negotiations on changing the pension’s system in the Commission will evolve, but so far there seems to be a staff union unity. Thus, the reform work continues within the Commission, even though most of the initial proposals either are implemented or are about to be implemented.

4.10.4 Support and representativity

Based on the description of the working methods of the staff unions and their level of membership, it seems reasonable to discuss the staff unions’ influence in staff representation and concertation. Several important points have already been mentioned. These include the importance of labour actions, unity between the staff unions, and the different tasks of the staff representation and concertation. How should one understand how representative the staff unions are? Representativity clearly depends on whether it is based on membership numbers or support in elections. The membership level is at best modest, while the electoral support seems quite strong. The staff representation is based on the latter approach, while access to the concertation is based on a combination. As the electorate support is rather strong, the representativity in staff representation seems unproblematic. There are no clear indications on the weight of the electoral versus the membership principles inside the concertation process. As the staff unions do not represent all staff, but primarily their members in these negotiations, it seems natural to assume that the election results would be dismissed in concertation negotiations. On the other hand, labour actions

\textsuperscript{33} It is uncertain what this division means for the future of the Alliance, but it indicates that a future confederation might not
are likely to be important arguments in the negotiations. The staff unions appear to have most of the staff behind them in these actions. The strike warning in February 2001 is a clear example of how labour actions might give the staff unions increased influence. The importance of the concertation process can best be understood by looking into the negotiations on the reform of the Commission.

Staff unions’ unity seems like an important strategy as they have rather low membership levels behind them independently. Even the total level of membership is not more than modest. The labour actions are closely connected to the unity of the staff unions. Labour action is not likely to be effective unless the staff unions are united in their cause. Due to the rather low membership levels, even a united staff union approach is dependent on attracting non-union-members in order to be effective. This makes labour action dependent on the issue that is at stake. In spite of all these dependencies, labour action is a strong weapon because both the staff unions and the non-unionised-staff have a common interest in defending the permanent and independent European civil service. In most cases, it is therefore reasonable to believe that the support of labour actions is strong because of common interests.

The staff representation is basically limited to applying the rules laid down in the Staff Regulations, and it therefore is more practically oriented than the concertation. It could, nevertheless, have importance on Commission decision-making because some of the tasks that staff representatives are involved with have implications on the Commission as an organisation. That could again affect the Commission’s decision-making. As this argument is based on the organisational perspective, it will be elaborated on in the next chapter. The staff unions’ influence on the reform provides a good picture of the importance of the concertation process.

be likely after all.
5. Chapter five: Interpreting the empirical results

5.1 Introduction
The previous chapter presented empirical results on the staff unions, while chapter two introduced theoretical perspectives on European Integration. In this chapter the empirical results will be interpreted through the different theoretical perspectives. The purpose of using theoretical perspectives is twofold; it contributes to understanding the staff unions of European institutions within the same framework(s) as other parts of the European Union, and it clarifies the importance of the empirical results. The chapter will be divided into sections for each of the theoretical perspectives.

5.2 Intergovernmental perspective
As mentioned in chapter two, the liberal intergovernmental approach is primarily used as a contradiction in this study. In a study of staff unions, liberal intergovernmental theory does not seem suitable because of the central perception of EU as politics between (member) states. If the staff unions were organised by nationality, and co-ordinated national interests among staff of the European institutions, then liberal intergovernmentalism would be useful. However, such an organisation of the staff unions would be highly incompatible with the principle of independence from national interests among staff in EU institutions. It is particularly in the Commission that this has been focused on, as the Commission is supposed to act independently, and defend common European interests. Furthermore, the empirical results are not supporting the idea that the staff unions are organised by nationality. The central actors in liberal intergovernmental theory are the national governments, and in a study of other actors this theory seems to be of limited value. It might therefore be argued that the perspective has no importance in this study, but it is vital to point out that there are parts of the European Union, and decision-making within it, that cannot be understood as politics between states.
Nationality becomes the most important division within EU in the liberal intergovernmental perception. In the staff unions, there are differences in the members’ nationalities, but none of the staff unions are dominated by one nationality, and all the staff unions are open for members of all nationalities. On one hand, it seems like the staff unions consider their members’ nationality as irrelevant. Nationality is mentioned in the rules of US, but the purpose seems to be to ensure that one nationality does not dominate in the executive committee\textsuperscript{34}. On the other hand, all the staff unions stressed defending an independent European civil service free from national pressure. Nationality is considered irrelevant, but at the same time it is emphasised that staff should act independent of national interests. None of these perceptions of nationality are compatible with the liberal intergovernmental perception. The notion of EU as politics between states is not suitable to understand the staff unions and their members, but it provides a contrasting image of EU.

The empirical results did not provide detailed information of the staff unions’ influence. The staff unions, nevertheless, seem to have some influence on the Commission through the staff representation, concertation and threats of labour actions. This implies a breach with another liberal intergovernmental perception, namely that governments of the member states are behind all the important decisions in EU decision-making. It is true that in the case of the administrative reform, the Council made some changes to the proposal of new staff regulations. On the other hand, large parts of the proposal were not changed, meaning that the Commission’s proposal, to a large extent, remained the same. The Commission’s proposal originated from negotiations between the staff unions and the Commission. Regardless of the actual influence in this case, the staff unions have to be accepted as participating actors in any issue that relates to staff policy. The liberal intergovernmental perspective has focused on the larger and history-making decisions in the European Union, and it might therefore seem unfair to compare with the staff unions’ influence in staff policy. However, the reform could be understood as a large and history-making decision, and the staff unions participated in the decision-making. From a

\textsuperscript{34} See US’s internal structure in section 4.4.1 or Union Synidcale 2002.
liberal intergovernmental point of view, the making of a proposal is not very interesting. It is taking the final decision within the Council that counts in decision-making. In such a view, the staff unions are without both influence and importance. On the other hand, if the process ahead of formally taking a decision is recognised as an important part of the decision-making, the staff unions have some influence. This leads towards a discussion of how to understand decision-making that will not be solved here. It, nevertheless, clarifies that there is more than one way of looking at the European Union, and therefore also more than one understanding of how it works.

5.3 Institutional perspectives
Several neo-institutional perspectives were introduced in chapter two. The common feature in all of these perspectives seems to be the highlighting of institutions as something more than the sum of actors within them. An institution has some sort of autonomy and importance of its own. By emphasising the importance of institutions, the institutional perspectives become flexible as they can be applied to all kinds of institutions. On the other hand, it is not obvious how institutional perspectives contribute beyond highlighting the role of institutions. Institutional perspectives, in this study, could be applied to the staff unions as institutions, to the Commission as an institution, and to the relationship between the staff unions and the Commission as an institution. There might also be other possible ways of applying institutional perspectives to this topic. The establishment of the Alliance that came about, at least partly, because of the new framework agreement, is an example of institutional changes within the staff unions. In this case, the staff unions could be understood as actors being shaped by the framework agreement as an institution. This indicates how institutional perspectives could be applied to the topic in many different ways. One important implication of this is that interpreting the empirical results through institutional perspectives involves several possible understandings. This is also due to the fact that there is more than one institutional perspective, and the different perspectives might give different interpretations.
Looking at staff unions as institutions is common for all the institutional perspectives. This means that the staff unions could be understood as something more than the active unionists, and that the unions, as such, have autonomy of their own. It could be useful to differentiate a bit between the staff unions. It seems plausible that the older staff unions are more institutionalised than the younger ones. US, SFIE and FFPE should have stronger autonomy and be harder to change than SFE, TAO/AFI and R&D. The empirical evidence does not seem to support any such differences, but the unions’ autonomy and ability to change was not covered explicitly in the interviews. It was, as mentioned, indicated that the smaller staff unions often were dominated by strong leaders, and that it made these unions very flexible (Interview).

The institutional perspectives could also be applied on the Commission as an institution. This has not been the primary objective of this study. It has nevertheless been revealed that the staff unions are potentially influential actors in the staff policy within the Commission. Institutional perspectives applied to the staff representation and concertation-process shows us that these structures seem well institutionalised as natural parts of the running of the Commission. The changes to concertation through a new framework agreement could question the institutionalisation of this process. On the other hand, the changes were completed with the understanding of both parties, and they are not changing the process itself, but the requirements of participation in the process.

5.3.1 Rational choice institutionalism

The rational choice institutionalism, with a perception of limited importance of the institutions and larger importance of the actors, seems to come closest to the intergovernmental perspective. Rational choice institutionalism could, however, also be applied on aspects that does not involve politics between member states. If the rational choice institutionalism is applied on the staff unions as institutions, one would expect that individual actors within the unions are almost equally as important as the staff unions. This importance of central actors was, as mentioned above, highlighted by the Commission official, but it was not mentioned by the unionists.
One of the implications of these strong leaders was that unionism turned into personal battlefields (Interview).

The other important implication in the rational choice institutionalism is that the actors’ preferences are given exogenously. This means that the staff unions cannot change the preferences of their members. The staff unions’ policies would thereby be a result of the composition of its members’ preferences, and hence have little autonomy as an institution in its own right. There should, however, still be a role for the institutions in the rational choice institutionalism, so a balance between the importance of actors’ preferences and the autonomy of the institution has to be struck.

5.3.2 Sociological and historical institutionalism
In the sociological and historical institutionalisms, the institutions are more important than in the rational choice institutionalism. The institutions’ strengthened importance is mostly due to the fact that actors’ preferences are shaped endogenously. Regarding this topic, it might be most interesting to see how these variants of institutionalisms offer other interpretations of the staff unions.

The amount of voluntary work inside the staff unions could be understood as an example of how the staff unions as institutions shape the preferences of the actors inside them. One would not expect that individual actors performed voluntary work for an institution, unless there is some kind of socialisation with the institution and its needs. The rational choice institutionalism with exogenous preference formation would not be able to explain this, but it is fully in line with endogenous preference formation found in the historical and sociological institutionalisms. The individual actors become socialised inside the staff unions, and this socialisation leads them to devote their spare time to the institution.

Even though there are significant differences in when the different staff unions were established, it is not obvious that this affects the staff unions today. It was, however, mentioned that R&D was considered the new generation of unionism by FFPE (Interview). The establishment of the newer unions could perhaps also be explained
by a perception of the old unions as too slow changing and too strongly bound by its early years. SFE seems to have been committed to more cooperation and access to power by co-operating with US. TAO/AFI emphasised opposition towards the existing staff unions as one of the important reasons behind establishing the union. R&D also claimed disagreement inside US as a key argument behind setting up the union. This could indicate that US and SFIE to some extent became institutionalised and harder to reform or change, and it was one of the reason behind the establishment of new staff unions. TAO/AFI, SFE and R&D were established primarily by former unionists in SFIE and US, and not by non-unionised staff. Other reasons behind the establishment of the newer staff unions have also been given in section 4.2.1.

As the historical background of unionism among staff in the European institutions date back to the mid 70s, and staff representation even further back, it might be expected that unionism and staff representation bare some resemblance of the days of its origin. Choices made then could, through institutionalisation, still be vital today. The common fight for a strong, permanent and independent European civil service appears to have been central throughout the staff unions’ history. There have probably not been many changes among staff regarding these issues during the last 30 years. The staff unions also tend to favour a pro-integrationist stand. This could be based on the strong support for such ideas among the staff in the earliest years of the Commission and its predecessor the High Authority. These values are, however, still strong within the Commission, but they are, according to Nugent (2001:185) weaker than in the formative years of the institution. The history of the staff and the staff unions could perhaps explain the rather strong opposition towards the administrative reform. The civil service that existed when the staff unions were institutionalised might not be very compatible with the civil service that the reform creates. It also fits well with the neo-institutional perception that institutions will oppose rapid changes and reforms. On the other hand, the staff of the Commission did not seem to eager for changes in the civil service either. In sum, therefore, it seems that the staff unions are up to date with the staff and not bound by the situation when they were established.
Cultural and cognitive features are central in the sociological institutionalism. One cultural feature that seems dominant in some of the staff unions is the confrontational working-style. It seems logical that this working-style has been adopted in the founding years of a staff union, and it might derive in the national traditions in working-style of the founding members. The institutionalisation of this working-style could limit the membership basis, as some are accustomed to this kind of working-style, while others might find it repulsive. A confrontational working-style might contribute to explain the differences in the nationality of the union members. In Scandinavia it seems to be more of a consensus-oriented working style, and this could be part of the explanation of relatively few Scandinavian staff union members.

5.3.3 Institutions of interest representation

Peters’ discussion around interest representation and institutionalism was presented in chapter two. In addition to institutional features found in other parts of neo-institutionalism, Peters (1999:112-125) added the concepts of pluralism, corporatism and networks or community to be applied on staff unions as institutions.

It seems that the staff unions in the Commission are following patterns of pluralism, as there are several staff unions, and they are competing against each other. Even though they sometimes work together, it seems clear that the competition on recruiting members and thereby increasing influence, is dominating the staff unions. One aspect that could be linked to corporatism is the fact that the Commission, to some extent, finances the staff unions. The framework agreement’s principles on what is needed in order to be a representative staff union, implies a move towards fewer staff unions, as it effectively limits the number of staff unions participating by setting tougher standards. This could lead the relationship between the Commission and the staff unions towards a system closer to corporatism. The idea behind the concertation seems to be rather close to pluralism. Staff representation, on the other hand, shares some of the features found in corporatism: It is one body, hence only competition within this body. The system was set up by the EU institutions, and is financed by them. As it is the Commission who is both the employer and the
governmental authority, it cannot be a classic iron triangle with government, employer and employees.

In network or community analysis the parts are supposed to be equal participants. This would be an overestimation of the staff unions’ influence in policy-making processes, but the notion of a network or community participating in the policy-making fits very well with policy-making in the Commission. The staff unions could be described as one of several groups, representing an interest, that are participating in policy-making in the Commission.

5.4 Organisational perspective
When describing an organisation, and its influence on the actors inside the organisation, a clear focus on certain features of the organisation is central in the organisational perspective. Four organisational features were introduced in chapter two: Organisational structure, organisational demography, organisational locus and institutionalisation.

5.4.1 Organisational structure
The organisational structure is expected to reveal conflict lines based on how the organisation is specialised. In general, in the case of staff unions in the Commission, it seems that the specialisation runs along the lines of different political sympathies. This is at least the clearest way of dividing the staff unions. It could be questioned whether the staff unions are specialised after political sympathies, but no other universal specialisation has been discovered in the empirical analysis. The empirical analysis revealed that the staff unions are not specialised by the nationalities or the grades of their members. Several of the staff unions have also members in different EU institutions. Thus, there appears to be no clear conflict lines regarding nationality, grade or institution. Some exceptions have been identified: SFIE claimed that decisions were harder to make at the central (“federal”) level in the organisation because of different opinions and interests in the different institutions. There also seemed to be some differences in the proportions of different grades and nationalities, but here the data was insufficient to find any clear patterns.
In the broader picture of the whole social dialogue, a specialisation within the Commission, dealing with the relationship between employer and employees, is identified. It is interesting to note that it is DG Personnel and Administration that is responsible for contact between the Commission and the staff unions. This indicates a functional specialisation for employer responsibilities within the Commission. At the national level similar structures may be found. The social dialogue, as a specialisation, highlights the conflict line between employer and employees. It has so far been rather neglected in research on the Commission and the actors surrounding it. The importance of this conflict line is limited to issues concerning staff and personnel policies within the European institutions. This might explain the limited interest in the subject, even though there occasionally are important issues in this policy field as well. The case of the administrative reform is a good example.

5.4.2 Organisational demography
Organisational demography refers to the composition of attributes like sex, education, age, nationality and length of service among the actors within the organisation. All of these factors are supposed to make an impact on decision-making in the organisation. Data on the organisational demography of the staff unions are rather absent from the empirical analysis. One exception is that the unionists appear to be Commission officials, and not recruited specialist from the outside. This ensures that they have experience from the situation that their members are in, and they should therefore identify with the ones they represent. One point that could weaken this identification is the length of service. In section 4.5, it was argued that the average length of service among unionists was rather long, but these data have not been further specified. On the other hand, the staff unions claimed that much of the work in the unions was performed voluntarily, and that should enhance the identification with the unions’ members. The organisational demography is connected to a process of socialisation in the organisation, and both the long time serving, and the willingness to work voluntary indicates that the unionists are being well socialised. This socialisation creates a strong identification with the staff union.
The staff representation entitles staff representatives to be participating in cases of recruitment and promotions. This enables the staff representatives to contribute to the shaping of the organisational demography of the Commission. In the next turn, it is argued by the organisational perspective, the demography impacts decision-making in the Commission. The influence of staff representatives might seem vague, indirect and long-term, but the staff representatives are, nevertheless, participating in both promotions and recruitment through advice from different committees.

5.4.3 Organisational locus
The organisational locus is the physical environment surrounding the organisation. All the staff unions, except US, are located in the same building in Brussels. It is likely that the contact between the staff unions located in the same building is increased by the short physical distance between them. US is located in a building of its own, and unlike the other staff unions’ offices this building is not an official location of the Commission. Without pulling the importance of this out of proportions, it is likely that the presence of an own building has an important positive effect on the identity and self esteem among US members. Regarding the contact patterns between US and the other staff unions, there are other contact opportunities through meetings in staff representation and other bodies, and there seems to be a quite high level of informal contact as well. The latter is largely due to a rather small group being heavily involved in the same questions.

5.4.4 Institutionalisation
In the organisational approach, institutionalisation is understood as something more than in the institutional perspectives. Institutionalisation is a process that takes time, and therefore, not all organisations are institutions in the organisational perspective. An organisation does not become an institution only by growing old. As mentioned in chapter two, there has to be a development of a self in the organisation. An institution will also develop a robustness that makes it hard to change the institution solely on technical or economic grounds. Three of the staff unions date rather far back, while the others are significantly younger. Still, it seems complicated to review the degree of institutionalisation of the different staff unions. Even R&D, the youngest staff
union has a history of more than 10 years, and it cannot be dismissed that this is too short for the development of a self in the organisation. Likewise, the oldest staff unions are more than 40 years old, but that does not guarantee a development of an organisational self. If the Alliance is developed into a confederation, one might therefore question whether the members’ organisations have ever been institutionalised. An institutionalised organisation would not be expected to make such a drastic change. However, the new framework agreement’s requirements for participation in concertation may be more of a threat to some of the staff unions than what would be understood as a change on technical or economic grounds.\textsuperscript{35}

In the broader picture of the relationship between employer and employees, it seems just to acknowledge that there has been an institutionalisation of the staff representation. The reform made no concrete changes to this system. It could be argued that it was due to the institutional status of the system that there were no changes, but the absence of changes could be due to other causes as well. The status of concertation is somewhat more uncertain, the changes in the 2001 framework agreement were substantial, but it appears that there is respect for the use of the system. In the reform case, the staff unions had to rely on labour actions threats to ensure negotiations, but the vital point is that they achieved the consultation they required. The concertation process therefore seems to be institutionalised or at least becoming institutionalised.

### 5.5 Multi level governance perspective

The multi level governance perspective’s main focus is the complexity of the polity of the European Union. It therefore makes little sense to apply this perspective on the staff unions as such. Multi level governance can, on the other hand, provide interesting interpretations of the environment the staff unions are operating within. As mentioned in chapter two, the multi level governance perspective divides this environment into different levels of governance. The staff unions in the Commission

\textsuperscript{35} Crisis may lead to rapid changes to institutions both according to the institutional perspectives and the organisational perspective.
are participating on the supranational level, without clear connections to national or regional levels. The other actors that the staff unions deal with are also at the supranational level, whether it is the EU institutions or the European trade union confederations. The existence of the national and regional levels, therefore, is of limited interest in this study.\textsuperscript{36}

The multi level governance perspective still provides useful understandings of the staff unions. First of all, the staff unions are assigned a place in the complex polity, as actors at the supranational level. The importance of the staff unions as actors could be questioned, but they seem to have some influence on the Commission, and certainly enough to be recognised as actors inside the staff policy area. The recognition of the staff unions is interesting, particularly because the staff unions so far have been more or less unknown. Secondly, two strategies for the staff unions of influencing EU decision-making can be drawn from the multi level governance perspective. A core feature in the multi level governance perspective has been the argument of multiple strategies for the actors operating in the European polity. There are other possible ways of influencing policy than what could be considered the most traditional channels. The staff unions have two clear strategies; influence through direct contact with the Commission, or influence through their status as members of European trade union confederations. These confederations are entitled to consultations with the Commission inside the European social dialogue. The direct link between the staff unions and the Commission is also known as a social dialogue, and it could be understood as a miniature of the European social dialogue. It seems that currently it is not more than a presence of the indirect channel of influence through European trade union confederations, and no active use of it. The staff unions are most likely considering their options better taken care of in direct negotiations with the Commission because of their small size compared to other trade unions in the European confederations. One could also question whether the staff unions share the

\textsuperscript{36} The Council could be understood as belonging to the national level because it is composed of national representatives, but this distinction is of limited interest as the staff unions primarily deal with the Commission.
same interests as other trade unions in the larger confederations. It seems reasonable to assume that there can only be agreements on small common denominators inside such big organisations, and this might be another reason for the staff unions to prefer direct talks with the Commission.

37 It could at least be argued that the staff of the European institutions has somewhat different interests and conflicts than other European employees.
6. Conclusions

6.1 Introduction
This last chapter will summarise the findings of the previous chapters and draw conclusions. It seems natural to divide it into sections devoted to each of the three questions raised in chapter one. Thus, section 6.2 summarise who the staff unions are, while how the staff unions work, and what kind of influence they have, are summarised in section 6.3 and 6.4. The interpretations presented in the previous chapter will be summarised in section 6.5. Section 6.6 looks into the questions that have been raised, but not answered by the thesis, before some concluding remarks are given in section 6.7.

6.2 Who are the staff unions?
Six of the staff unions that organise employees in the Commission have been described in this thesis. This description has been the primary focus of the thesis, as little information on staff unions organising employees of EU institutions existed. Staff unions in EU institutions date more than 30 years back, and the system of staff representation is even older. The competition between the staff unions increased in the late 80s and early 90s with the establishment of three new unions in the Commission in Brussels. However, changes in the concertation process appear to lead towards a reduction in the number of staff unions in the years to come. The level of membership in the staff unions is modest, but they do attract support from non-unionised staff in elections and labour actions.

The six staff unions in this study differ in many regards, but they have also something in common. The most obvious of differences are political values, size and organisation, as well as membership profile. The staff unions share one political opinion, internal organisational bodies and membership market. They were placed from the extreme left to the extreme right on a traditional left-right political scale. This scale appears to be the clearest way of separating them. On the other hand, they
share the view of increased integration and a strengthening of the Commission’s role inside the European Union. This view seems closely connected to the self interests of staff, and it therefore is no surprise that it is shared by all the staff unions.

It was estimated that the largest staff union (US) had about eight times as many members as the smallest (TAO/AFI). Based on the election results from December 2002, US and R&D are the two biggest staff unions in the Commission in Brussels. The other four unions are more even in size. However, it is worth noticing that this does not include other parts of the staff unions that have other sections than the Commission in Brussels. This brings us to the next major difference, size of the organisation. US and FFPE have sections in most of the institutions and locations in EU. On the other hand, SFE are only based in the Commission in Brussels, and the others are somewhere in between. Even though the size of the organisations differs, the internal bodies inside each section are similar in all the staff unions.

The membership profile of the staff unions differed with regard to nationality and grade, but without any clear patterns. The dominating nationalities were Belgian, Italian and French. All of the unions had fewer North-European members, except FFPE. US, R&D and FFPE have more A- and B-grade members, while the majority in the other unions are B- and C-grade members. Despite these differences, all the staff unions are open to members of all nationalities and grades, as long as they work in, or are retired from, one of the EU institutions. Nothing indicates that the staff unions have hidden recruitment policies that differ from this principle either.

### 6.3 How are the staff unions working?

The social dialogue between the Commission as an employer and its employees is divided into two systems; the staff representation and the concertation negotiations. The history of the staff representation date further back than the staff unions, but as the unions also dominate within the staff representation, it seems logical to include it

---

38 SFIE would not reveal its number of members. In the elections in December 2002 it became, together with SFE, the smallest staff union with only two representatives each.
in the way the staff unions work. The staff representation could be summarised as elected representatives that advice the administration in questions related to the running of the Commission. The concertation, on the other hand, is a system that is set up specifically to deal with the relationship between the employer and the staff unions. Whereas the staff representation deals with practical matters, the concertation is more political. In other words, the staff representation gives advice on individual decisions, while the concertation is negotiation on broader policy issues that affect staff.

The working style of the staff unions was also analysed. It appears confrontational at first sight, but behind closed doors the staff unions reach for a consensus. This working style applies both to the relationship between the staff unions and between the unions and the employer.

6.4 What kind of influence have the staff unions got?
The empirical analysis has revealed that the staff unions are actors in decision-making within the staff policy area through the staff representation and concertation. It is not easy to specify the influence of any such actor, as the term itself is hard to measure. In addition to this, the staff unions’ influence also seems dependent on their ability to form a common position and to attract the support of non-unionised staff. When they have succeeded in both these regards, the staff unions have at least ensured that the employer takes their views into account. Proposing initiatives and being pro-active in the concertation negotiations was considered essential for the staff unions to be influential. This argument would probably apply in all negotiations, but it is even more important in negotiations with the Commission because of its openness towards input in the decision-making. Furthermore, some indications of common interests between the staff unions and the Commission were found. In cases where this exists, the staff unions could be expected to be perceived as strong and influential, as such an impression would strengthen the Commission’s position before negotiations with the other EU institutions.
6.5 Theoretical interpretations

In chapter five, the empirical results were interpreted in the lights of four theoretical perspectives. From the onset of this study it was not obvious how the theories could contribute to enhance the understanding of the staff unions. It has, nevertheless, been shown that there are several interesting interpretations that can be made based on the empirical results. The interpretations are not only covering the staff unions themselves, but also their role and influence in the EU system.

6.5.1 The staff unions

The staff unions cannot be explained through an intergovernmental perspective, as they do not resemble politics between member states. The multi level governance perspective is not useful in the understanding of the staff unions as such either.

There are different opinions on the relationship between individual actors and the institution in the institutional perspectives. In the empirical analysis, both arguments highlighting the importance of the individual actors and of the institutions were found. It was argued that the smaller staff unions are dominated by the individual actors. Furthermore, many of the unionists are detached as unionists for long periods. On the other hand, the unions affect individual preferences through socialisation, and this leads to voluntary work. Additionally, there were indications on differences among the staff unions based on their founding years. Finally, the opposition towards reform of the Commission indicates that a traditional perception on the civil service is institutionalised.

The organisational structure of the staff unions indicated a specialisation along the lines of political ideology. The organisational demography showed recruitment of Commission officials which should lead to strong identification with the members. All the unions except US are located in the same building, and their contact should therefore be enhanced. On the other hand, US might increase its identity and self esteem through a location of its own. The institutionalisation of the staff unions is difficult to measure in the understanding of the organisational perspective.
6.5.2 The staff unions as a part of EU
The influence of the staff unions in the running of the Commission cannot be explained by the intergovernmental perspective. This shows that EU has to be understood as more than politics between member states. Furthermore, it shows that there are other important conflict lines, than nationality, at work inside the European Union.

The conflict line between employer and employees is well developed, and has been institutionalised\(^{39}\) over the last decades. Therefore, it is not easy to change or remove. The conflict line between employer and employees can be understood as a specialisation in the organisational structure of the Commission, with DG Personnel and Administration as the responsible unit. The staff unions seem to prefer the social dialogue inside the institution to the European social dialogue, even though four of them have links towards this dialogue as well. This is not line with the expectations in the multi level governance perspective. However, it might be unfair to make this comparison as the staff unions and all their contacts only operate at the European level.

6.6 Reminding, or new, blank spots
Part of the reason behind an explorative study is to raise new questions through the exploration of a blank spot. This is also the case in this thesis. In what seems to be an unexplored research area, new questions are raised as parts of the area are discovered. The empirical data in this study are only covering the staff unions in the Commission in Brussels, and other staff unions in EU institutions remain scientifically undescribed. It does not seem likely that there are other larger staff unions, but a description of the whole universe of staff unions in EU institutions would provide an answer to that. Additionally, it is room for more extensive studies of the staff unions and their influence. Are there important differences connected to the different EU

\(^{39}\) Here, the term institutionalised cover the understanding of both the institutional perspectives and the organisational perspective.
institutions, or are the influence and working conditions of the staff unions similar in all these institutions?

It would also be interesting to compare the staff unions and the social dialogue inside EU institutions with similar organisations and structures at the national level. Questions related to this have been raised in the thesis, but no answers are provided. Has the European level adopted almost the same structures as the nation states, and what traditions, if any, is the European level imitating?

6.7 Concluding remarks
The primary object of this thesis has been to answer three questions regarding the staff unions in EU institutions. The study has hopefully contributed to a better understanding of previously undescribed actors that operate inside the complex machinery called the European Union. Neither the staff unions nor the social dialogue are new in the Commission, but they have not been scientifically focused on so far. The presence, within the Commission, of trade unions and an institutionalised social dialogue is another well known structure at the national level, which is also found at the European level. As more parallels between the national and the European levels are found, it becomes increasingly clear that the European level cannot be understood only as an intergovernmental organisation. Additionally, treating the European Union as only a system of its own, a *sui generis*, seems less appropriate with an increasing number of parallels to the national level. It is perhaps through the study of internal parts of the EU institutions that the resemblance to governmental institutions at the national level primarily is found. These resemblances, together with the intergovernmental and the *sui generis* approaches, contribute to complement our understanding of the European Union.
References


Archive documents


Interviews

The following persons contributed with empirical material through interviews:

Allan Hick, Union Syndicale.
David Taylor, Syndicat des Fonctionnaires Européens.
Jacqueline Escale, Syndicat des Fonctionnaires Internationaux.
Olga Profili, Renouveau et Démocratie.
Rosario De Simone, Association des Fonctionnaires Indépendants pour la Défense de la Fonction Publique Européenne.
Serge Crutzen, Fédération de la Fonction Publique Européenne.
Stefan Huber, European Commission.