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**Governing European Affairs**

Lessons from Norwegian Ministries

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**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to examine the role of ministerial officials in an integrated European multilevel administrative order. This study argues that organizational variables at the national level constitute a decisive filtering factor regarding how decision premises emanating from European Union (EU)-level institutions are received by domestic government institutions and officials. The study contributes to the literature in two main ways: Empirically it provides a comprehensive study of the role of Norwegian ministerial officials in the EU multilevel administrative order over a time period of 20 years ( $n=3562$ ). Secondly, it applies an organization theory approach to explain variation in actual decision-making behavior. The article discusses factors of general relevance to political science applicable beyond the case at hand. The study shows that ministerial officials are deeply involved with the EU multilevel administration. Moreover, it confirms the pivotal role of organizational factors in public governance processes.

**Keywords:** EU decision making; European administration; Norwegian ministries.

## 1 Introduction

Numerous studies have documented the emergence of an integrated European administrative order, consisting of national and supranational bodies as well as administrative networks which aid in drawing these closer together (see Egeberg 2006; Hofmann and Turk 2006; Bauer and Trondal 2015; Egeberg and Trondal 2017; Mastenbroek and Martinsen 2017). Administrative integration across levels of governance have partly been driven by the needs to harmonize national public policy towards a common European standard. At the same time,

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such harmonization challenges national administrative and political sovereignty, characterized by national political-administrative control over state administration and public governance processes. A central question is how national central administrations govern when they constitute a part of a more integrated European administrative order. This article sheds light on this question by presenting a study of Norwegian ministry officials' handling of European Union (EU) affairs over two decades. The dataset consists of a survey from the Norwegian central administration from 1996, 2006 to 2016 ( $n = 3562$ , see below for details).

The role of the bureaucracy in public policy-making is disputed, but still well documented (Olsen 2010; Dahlstrøm and Lapuente 2017). While the political level in a government is subject to ideological contestation and a constant change, the administrative level is to a larger extent characterized by organizational stability, behavioral continuity and professional autonomy (Christensen et al. 2018). This creates tension in the civil servant role and can lead to uncertainty related to what premises lay behind the administration's conduct at any time. Norwegian civil servants have long participated in international organizations and networks. As a result of closer and deeper European integration, the Norwegian central administration has, however, gained gradually closer and more binding agreements with the EU. This takes place even if Norway is not a full member of the EU. Our argument is that the Norwegian central administration has gained an administrative membership, which we empirically show have become institutionalized and consolidated over time. The article shows that the ministry officials are extensively involved at the EU level. This leads to actual decision-making behavior increasingly being biased on premises set by various supranational bodies (Danielsen 2008; Egeberg and Trondal 2018). This study shows, however, that organizational factors at the national level – within the central administration (here: the primary structure) are important in explaining national civil servants' actual behavior (see Trondal et al. 2017; Egeberg and Stigen 2019).

Studies of administrative integration in Europe have increasingly been empirically oriented towards agencies, as these are most exposed to co-option from the supranational level (Egeberg 2006). Studies show how organizational decoupling within national central management leads to national agencies being loosely connected to the political leadership and therefore more likely to reconnect with other organizational bodies – such as EU-level bodies (Egeberg and Trondal 2009). National agencies have thus become participants in a common European multilevel administration and thereby become embedded in two administrative orders – one supranational (EU) and one national. As a result, Norwegian agencies act as a “direct implementation authority” in which the EU Commission interacts directly with them when EU legislation is implemented, without using “the chain of command” via a superior ministry. This study adds

to this picture that the Norwegian “EU administration” also includes ministerial staff. Europeanization thus also penetrates a non-member state’s core-executive. This form of administrative integration raises questions about the conditions for national political governance of the civil service, including the conditions for national sovereignty over national administration policy.

This study contributes to a vast research literature on the policy implications of transnational administrative networks that span levels of governance (Egeberg and Trondal 2017; Mastenbroek and Martinsen 2017; Stone and Moloney 2018). The theoretical argument is that organizational variables affect and adjust officials’ behavior. In contrast to the “classic” national “closed” central government apparatus, ministry employees are also participants in a set of international and transnational organizations. Consequently, we assume that officials are exposed to non-national premises for actual behavior. The data-set used is three large-N surveys conducted among Norwegian ministry employees in 1996, 2006 and 2016 ( $n=3562$ ).<sup>1</sup> In summary, the article contributes to the research literature in two main ways: First, the article highlights the ministries’ role in European multilevel administration and the implications of multilevel administration for ministerial governance processes. Organizational proximity to political leadership gives reason to assume that ministry staff are more sheltered from adopting supranational impulses and signals than agency staff. This study suggests that this is not the case, and therefore demonstrates the depth of administrative integration within the core-executive of the state. Second, this study illustrates how organizational variables at the national level help to explain variation in ministerial officials’ EU-related work. This provides the basis for drawing three main conclusions regarding the importance of organizational factors:

- (i) Organizational compatibility increases the likelihood of administrative integration and coordination across levels.
- (ii) Both intra- and inter-organizational vertical specialization (positional level and ministry/agency affiliation) lead to a loose coupling between officials and the political leadership. This grants a relative decoupling from primary structures and an increased likelihood of reconnecting with other organizational configurations (here: the EU-level).
- (iii) Finally, the study confirms the importance of primary structures for actual behavior.

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<sup>1</sup> The study only includes officials indicating that they are affected by the EU/EEA/Schengen, meaning officials with value 1–4 on the following scale: (1) to a very large degree, (2) to a fairly large degree, (3) to some degree/somewhat, (4) to a fairly small degree, and (5) not affected.

The article is organized as follows: The next section outlines the theoretical framework and propositions that form the basis for the empirical study. Then follows a section on data and methods. The third section presents Norway's form of association to the EU and Norwegian "European administration," followed by findings from the central administration surveys. The final section summarizes key findings and implications for public governance and administrative sovereignty.

## 2 An Organizational Approach

Public administration studies have to a limited degree dealt with how organizational structures at one level constrain and enable policy formulation at another level (Egeberg and Trondal 2016; Trondal and Bauer 2017). Recent studies argue that in a situation with a tightly integrated administrative orders, decision-making at one level may have significant consequences for similar processes at another level. The theoretical framework in this article assumes that organizational variables can explain how the EU (supranational level) affects actual behavior within national central administrations (national level) (March and Olsen 1989; Egeberg et al. 2016; Egeberg and Trondal 2016). An organizational theoretical perspective assumes that features of the organization influence individuals' behavioral patterns by directing their attention to certain problems, alternatives and solutions (Simon 1957). Organizational variables include organizational structure, organizational demographics, organizational site, and organizational culture (Egeberg 2012; Egeberg and Trondal 2018). The focus of this article is the consequences of organizational design – horizontal and vertical specialization, respectively, – and organizational affiliation – primary and secondary, respectively (see below). There are two main reasons for this choice: First, numerous studies demonstrate the explanatory power of organizational structure on actual behavior (Simon 1957; Augier and March 2001; Lægreid and Christensen 2006; Trondal 2006; Egeberg et al. 2016). Secondly, organizational structure is easier to design/manipulate than most other factors which influence public governance processes, and may therefore constitute an important design tool and management resource (Egeberg and Trondal 2018). Organizational structure is a normative structure that defines roles, responsibilities and thus decision-making powers. It provides a predictable framework for actual behavior that guides the selection of relevant actors as well as selection and framing of problems and solutions. An organizational perspective assumes that officials hold limited cognitive resources. This entails computational limitations related to information gathering, processing and use, which leads to officials seeking satisfactory rather than optimal solutions. A key point is that the organizational structure simplifies the cognitive reality of officials by systematically directing attention towards a given set

of possible alternatives (Simon 1957). In other words, the structure bias the activities that are likely to be carried out by focusing on some problems and solutions over others (March and Olsen 1976; Egeberg and Trondal 2016). This also implies that the organizational structure has an indirect influence on society by biasing policy design and governing processes. In this article, it is argued that organizational features of the central administration may account for how the EU influences actual behavior among ministerial officials, and ultimately the national public policy-making process. Below, we discuss two organizational variables: horizontal and vertical specialization, and primary and secondary organizational affiliation.

Horizontal specialization refers to how tasks are distributed between or within organizations. According to Gulick (1937), tasks can be divided based on four different principles: purpose, process, clientele and geography. Choosing one organizational division of tasks – or specialization principle – will bias which cooperation patterns and lines of conflict characterize the organization. Consequently, the choice of organizational specialization is ultimately a political choice. For example, geographical division will support territorial variation, while subdivision based on purpose will mobilize cooperation within policy sectors and at the same time reinforce conflict lines between sectors. Similar to other OECD countries, the Norwegian central administration is characterized by extensive horizontal purpose and process specialization, consisting of sector ministries and agencies. An immediate consequence of purpose and process specialization is a higher degree of coordination within different sectors and a lower degree of cross-sectoral coordination. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by contrast, is different in that it is the only national ministry based on the principle of geography since the ministry is tasked with aggregating so-called national interests and positions. Similar to national sector ministries, the EU administrative structure (notably the European Commission) is also largely based on a sectoral structure with specialized departments (Directorates-General (DGs)) and underlying sector-specialized EU agencies. This structure is to a large degree similar to the Norwegian central administration. We argue that compatible organizational structures at the national and supranational governance levels increase the likelihood of administrative integration and coordination across levels. A fragmented national state based on sector specialization is consequently an organizational condition for administrative integration across different levels. This, however, also means that the effect of organizational principles at one level of government is contingent on the degree of organizational compatibility across levels of government (March and Olsen 1995; Knill and Lemkuhl 1999; Cowles et al. 2001). The underlying assumption here is that compatible organizational principles underpin and reinforce officials' established ways of thinking as well as their understanding of roles, and premises of actual behavior (Martens 2010).

Although intergovernmental cooperation has long existed, the EU's position as a European administrative center has become significantly more important over the last decades (Majone 1996; Dehousse 1997; Levi-Faur 2011; Joosen and Brandsma 2017). Previous studies have also shown a relatively high degree of administrative integration between the Norwegian central administration and the EU level (Egeberg and Trondal 1999), as well as increased integration over time (NOU 2012:2: p. 2). This is partly due to the expansion of Norway's agreements with the EU, and partly due to increased administrative capacity at both the national and the supranational level. Moreover, as a result of organizational compatibility, we can expect Norwegian ministerial officials to primarily interact with "sister-ministries" at the supranational level, notably the Commission's DGs and/or EU agencies. However, this assumption also implies that, unlike sector ministries, officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will tend to interact with the Council (the Union Council). This is due to organizational compatibility between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Council (geographical specialization).

In conclusion, organizational compatibility across levels of government is expected to mobilize officials in sector ministries towards the Commission rather than towards other EU bodies (H1). Furthermore, we expect that purpose specialization contributes to coordination of ministerial EU governance largely within (intra-) than between (inter-) ministries (H2).

Vertical specialization includes the division of responsibility between (inter) and within (intra) different levels of authority, and therefore distributes rights and duties between different organizational layers. The structural decoupling between ministries and agencies is arguably a precondition for multilevel integration as this relatively speaking "isolates" agencies from strong political steering at the national level (Lægreid and Olsen 1978; Egeberg and Trondal 2009). Vertical loose coupling within the central administration leads, first, to a larger room of maneuver and cultivation of technical considerations in agencies, and as a result, opportunities for agencies to reconnect with other organizations (Egeberg 2006). Such organizational decoupling of national agencies therefore implies that they can be more easily incorporated into a common European administrative order. Inter-organizational vertical specialization at the national level therefore serves as a catalyst for the rise of a common European administrative system (Trondal 2017). Contrary to agencies, ministries are directly and primarily governed by political leadership and political concerns (Egeberg and Trondal 2009). This, at the same time, increases the likelihood of actual behavior among ministerial officials being driven by political signals and considerations, and consequently less opportunity to develop a strong relationship with external organizations – such as EU-level bodies. In other words, we can expect lower degrees of EU integration among ministerial officials than among agency officials. This does, however, not mean that ministerial personnel are

expected to be fully sheltered from supranational influence. Intra-organizational vertical specialization also refers to staffs' *position* within ministries. Studies show that political considerations increase with higher positions (Læg Reid and Olsen 1978; Egeberg and Trondal 2009). One reason is that officials who are holding higher-level positions often have a broader view of the organization's activities and must balance more considerations than lower-level officials. Higher-ranking officials also to a larger degree identify with the organization as a whole, while lower-level officials are more often concerned with professional portfolios (Egeberg and Sætren 1999). They therefore have a less broad perspective of the organizations than officials with higher pay-grades. One consequence of lower-level officials being less connected to their own leadership is that they can become more sensitive and accessible to premises from external organizations, especially actors who work with similar portfolios or in similar organizational fields.

Cumulatively, we therefore expect that the position levels will be reflected in that officials in higher positions are less involved in EU-related work than officials in lower positions (H3).

Finally, we distinguish between primary and secondary organizational structures. The former refers to the organization in which the official is employed, receives his or her salary, and spends most of his or her time and energy. The primary structure for ministerial officials is their respective ministry organization. Secondary structures refer to collegial structures where officials act as part-time participants, for example EU committees. In a multilevel administrative structure, officials tend to participate in both primary and secondary structures that can, to varying *degrees*, affect actual behavior. We assume that primary structures to have greater behavioral effects than secondary structures (March 1994). We nevertheless also assume that actual decision behavior is a result of the sum of all premise provided the sum of organizational affiliations embedding staff (Egeberg and Trondal 2015).

Consequently, officials will emphasize signals from all structures in which they are embedded, but still mainly take the primary structure into account (H4). It is further expected that officials in conflict situations will prioritize primary structures – that is, in situations where the primary and secondary structures require different behaviors (H5).

### 3 Data and Methods

The study is based on data from three comprehensive surveys conducted in the Norwegian central administration in 1996, 2006 and 2016 (total  $n=5693$ ; this article is based on a selection of these – see below), hereafter referred to as The Central Administration Survey. The Norwegian central administration has been

subject of a comprehensive questionnaire survey among employees every ten years from 1976 to 2016 (see Table 1). The surveys cover officials' backgrounds, careers, internal and external contacts, priorities, perceptions of power relations, reforms and internationalization. From 1996, the surveys also included questions about the administration's EU affiliation and EU/EEA/Schengen activities. This article only includes officials indicating that they were affected (to some extent or more) by EU/EEA/Schengen activities ( $n = 3562$ ). The surveys only include officials who had been employed at the advisor level or above, and with at least one year of service. The Norwegian government-appointed power-study (1972–1982) initiated the first survey. It included all ministries, including the Prime Minister's office. Starting in 1986, agencies and agency-like bodies were also included (see Table 1). Due to the large number of employees, only every third employee at the advisor level and above were included in the agency sample. Starting in 2006, the surveys were conducted as web-based surveys administered by the Norwegian Social Science Data Service, now the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD). All data from 1976 and later are stored and made publicly available by NSD.

Table 1 shows that the response rate has been slowly declining over time, from 72% in 1976 to 60% in 2016. However, even in 2016 the response rate remains unusually large when seen in an international context. The probability that the Central Administration Survey not being representative is therefore far less than for similar surveys in other countries. In the 2016 survey, however, the proportion of unanswered questions rose noticeably towards the end of the relatively extensive questionnaire. Unanswered questions, though, did not seem to be systematically related to specific characteristics of the respondent, such as positional level. Therefore, since lack of responses appears to be a general "fatigue phenomenon" as seen in most contemporary survey studies, this is unlikely to reduce the representativeness of the current study.

Data based on surveys have some general limitations. They provide information about the respondents' subjective perceptions, and it is not given that

**Table 1:** The Central Administration Survey: Number of Respondents and Response Rate.

	Ministries		Agencies	
	Number of answers	Response rate	Number of answers	Response rate
1976	784	72	–	–
1986	1185	72	1072	68
1996	1497	72	1024	64
2006	1874	67	1452	59
2016	2322	60	1963	60



these reflect actual behavior. Respondents may for example underestimate or exaggerate their own or others' role, and thereby provide biased representation of actual roles. This can, for example, be caused by incorrect interpretation of past memories or a desire to emphasize certain aspects over other. Questionnaires have, to a large extent, attempted to ask questions that indirectly capture various aspects of employees' everyday lives by using so-called "proxies." The likelihood of robust data increases when using a high number of proxies, a high number of respondents, and a high number of time periods. Ideally, one should carry out longitudinal studies by following the same respondents over time. This would provide a more solid basis for analyzing continuity and change. The type of data presented in this article can still provide valuable insight into change and continuity over time.

## 4 Background and History: Norwegian Ministries' EU-Related Activities

The Norwegian central administration consists of ministries with decentralized agencies. The government system rests of ministerial government in with responsible minister(s) have the overall responsibility for all activities running in their own ministry and their underlying agencies. The number of employees in the central administration has increased from around 13,000 in 1994 to approximately 21,000 in 2015. Of these, 4600 are employed by the ministries, while the remaining 16,400 are employed in agencies (DiFi 2015). The ministries function mainly as secretariats for the political leadership with tasks related to coordination and planning, but increasingly focused on managerial tasks and much less on individual cases (Christensen et al. 2018). The agencies, on the other hand, are overly professionally focused, supporting ministries by primarily being involved in the preparation, implementation and administration of the policy process. Ministerial staff are directly subject to political leadership, while agency personnel primarily report to the director who is employed on permanent basis. This distance to political leadership (interorganizational vertical specialization) means that agency employees in reality have greater leeway to make professional considerations and can more easily associate with external actors. Ministerial officials are in this way more bound by shifting political signals and mandates.

The implementation of the EEA Agreement in 1994 marked the beginning of a new form and intensity of European cooperation for Norway and the government apparatus. With an imminent referendum on EU membership on November 28 1994, many viewed the EEA Agreement as an interim period on the road towards

full EU membership. After the referendum, however, the EEA agreement has become the foundation for Norway's relations with the EU. Furthermore, Norway and the EU have also entered into a vast number of sector agreements in other areas, and the total now counts 130 agreements. The EEA Agreement differs from these sectoral agreements in that it has a dynamic and open-ended structure. This means that the content and scope of the agreement is updated continuously in line with new EU legislation. Compared to full EU membership, the EEA Agreement does not grant Norway access to the political decision-making processes in the EU (political representation), but it opens up for extensive administrative participation at various stages in the EU legislative process. Norwegian officials have the opportunity to participate in the Commission's expert groups, in comitology committees, as well as on advisory and scientific boards and project groups in various EU agencies. Furthermore, the Norwegian government also have the opportunity to second national experts to the Commission on par with EU member-states. While the Norwegian political leadership therefore is sidelined, the central administration is, to a large extent, involved in decision-making processes at the supranational level – in reality at the same level as the central administrations of EU member states. As such, the Norwegian quasi-membership in the EU has mobilized an administrative bias in EU-related policy processes.

Both the Norwegian central administration and the EU's administrative apparatus are mainly organized according to the principles of purpose and function. From an organizational theoretical perspective, this has two primary consequences: First, it increases the likelihood of horizontal (sector) integration of administrative bodies across levels of governance. Second, it is also likely that this will further underpin interdepartmental fragmentation inside the Norwegian central administration. When it comes to the harmonization of legislation and technical standards, this form of half-way membership provides for the same degree of administrative integration as for EU member states (Egeberg and Trondal 1999; Eriksen and Fossum 2014). Moreover, since Norway does not have a mandate to participate in the Council of Ministers, there are few driving forces within the central administration to develop overall national positions across the ministries. National viewpoints are therefore largely represented by the central administration's sectoral participation at the EU level. In effect, this may lead to the Norwegian central administration being more "directly" influenced by the EU administration than the member states, since the sectoral integration between the Commission and sector ministries is not cushioned and curbed by the national political leadership (Trondal 2002).

In the following, we examine two dimensions of the Norwegian central administration's EU involvement, namely its form and scope. While the form of affiliation between Norway and the EU has been stable during the last 20 years (sectoral

affiliation), the content (scope) has undergone considerable expansion. This is primarily due to the EU's development from a primary focus on economic cooperation towards a broader and deeper political union, which has led to ever more agreements with Norway, as well as the expansion of existing ones (notably the EEA). The Norwegian government commissioned study on the effects of Norway's relationship with the EU (NOU 2012:2: p. 38) highlighted five factors that have increased the scope of this association over time: (a) Geographical expansion of the EU and therefore an increase in the number of EEA members, (ii) new agreements in new policy areas, (iii) new legislation within the framework of existing agreements, (iv) the development of existing agreements through interpretation and practice, and (v) unilateral Norwegian adaptation to the EU outside the contractual framework. The Norwegian central administration has, due to this, been drawn closer towards EU institutions and policy processes. This also means that Norwegian government officials are more likely to be closely involved in EU activities (broadly defined). Table 2 shows how affected ministerial officials are by the EU/EEA and Schengen agreement over time. Despite increasing scope of the agreements, the table shows overall stability in the general influence of the EU/EEA/Schengen on the government apparatus.

Ministerial staff were asked to report their contacts towards and participation in various EU institutions. Table 3 highlights two main findings, where we distinguish between officials in the sector ministries and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: First, the data show stability over time, both with regard to contact and participation with the EU institutions. The volume of contacts between sector ministries and the Commission increased considerably from 1996 to 2006, but has subsequently stabilized. This increase may be due to the fact that the EU expanded their political competences and membership pool during this period, which had subsequent implications for the number and scope of agreements with Norway. At the same time, the EU also increased its administrative capacity, among other aspects, through the establishment of a number of new EU agencies. As a result, we see more stability

**Table 2:** Percentage of Respondents Indicating that they are Affected by the EU/EEA/Schengen Over Time.

	1996	2006	2016
To a very large degree	11	13	14
To a fairly large degree	12	12	12
Somewhat	23	18	23
To a fairly small degree	27	21	31
Not affected	27	37	20
<i>n</i>	100	100	100
	(1463)	(1704)	(1773)

**Table 3:** Percentage of Respondents Indicating that they had been in Contact with\* or Participated in\*\* EU Institutions during the Last Year, by Year and Ministry (Sector Ministries (SM)/Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)).

	1996		2006		2016		Average <i>n</i>
	SM	MFA	SM	MFA	SM	MFA	
Contacts with the Commission	68	32	83	17	83	17	100 (115)
Contacts with the Council	–	–	–	–	57	43	100 (21)
Contacts with the EU Parliament	–	–	–	–	22	78	100 (9)
Contacts with ED agencies	–	–	90	10	76	24	100 (39)
Participation in expert committees	82	18	95	5	89	11	100 (94)
Participation in comitology committees	86	14	100	0	100	0	100 (21)
Participation in the Council	–	–	–	–	60	40	100 (10)
Participation in committees, boards, etc. under EU agencies	–	–	–	–	94	6	100 (18)

\*The contact variable combines value 1 and 2 on the following value scale: (1) approx. every week, (2) approx. every month, (3) a few times, and (4) never.

\*\*The participant variable uses value 1 on the following value scale: (1) several times, (2) one time, and (3) never.

in the contact patterns between Norwegian ministries and the Commission during the last decade. It is also worth noting that contacts between sector ministries and EU agencies has decreased between 2006 and 2016. One possible explanation for this is that Norwegian agencies handle these contacts, and thus not ministerial personnel (Egeberg and Trondal 2017). Studies show that both the Commission and EU agencies address national agencies directly instead of going through the ministerial level (Egeberg and Trondal 2009). This may in turn indicate a form of institutionalization of a multilevel administrative architecture with consolidated roles and division of labor between ministries and agencies. Table 3 also shows significant differences between sector ministries and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with regard to the degree of contact and participation with EU bodies. Sector ministries seem to be mainly responsible for interaction with EU institutions. This observation can be linked to organizational compatibility across levels of government: Compatible organizational principles bias the attention of sector ministries towards the Commission, EU agencies and expert groups, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs focus attention towards the territorially specialized Council structure.

Table 4 shows how and to what extent the ministries' EU activities are coordinated. Overall, the figures show a relatively low degree of ministerial coordination. This pattern is also stable over two decades. As expected, intradepartmental coordination is generally stronger than interdepartmental coordination (H2). Furthermore, the figures suggest that the proportion of ministerial staff who meet in

**Table 4:** Proportion of Respondents Indicating that they Participated in the Following Coordination Bodies in Connection with their EU/EEA/Schengen Activities.\*

	1996	2006	2016
Intra-ministerial coordination committees (own ministry)**	18	18	13
Special inter-ministerial coordination committees***	17	15	9
The Government Coordination Committee****	5	7	5
Average <i>n</i>	100 (1038)	100 (1056)	100 (1402)

\*The variable uses value 1 on the following value scale: (1) several times, (2) once, and (3) never.

\*\*The purpose of these committees is to increase the coordination of EU-related activities within each sector ministry.

\*\*\*These committees are headed by the responsible sector ministry with the task to increase coordination EU-related activities between the affected ministries.

\*\*\*\*This committee is headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its task is to coordinate EU-related activities that have not been resolved in any of the other coordinating committees.

special inter-ministerial coordination committees is reduced over time relative to the proportion who meet in coordination committees. The figures also suggest that participation in coordination committees has had a steady decline over the last 20 years, especially in the period from 2006 to 2016. This may be due to the fact that EU-related activities have become both more specialized and integrated inside ministries, and that the need for coordination through formal bodies and meetings has consequently dropped. Another possible cause may, as mentioned above, be that a larger proportion of EU-related tasks have been taken over by agencies. However, it should be noted that participation in coordination committees does not necessarily imply actual coordination of policy content. Studies have suggested that such collegial committees function more as information exchange bodies than as actual coordination instruments between ministries (Trondal 2001).

We have assumed that lower-level officials may be more closely involved in EU/EEA/Schengen activities than higher-level officials (H3). Table 5 confirms this. The figures show that it is most common that lower-level officials enjoy contacts with and participate in EU institutions. Development from 2006 to 2016 also shows a slight increase in the interaction between lower-level officials and EU institutions, and a corresponding decrease for higher-level officials. This may again be due to the fact that EU-related activities have become routinized and integrated into daily routines in ministerial portfolios. Another possible cause may be the expansion of the agreements between the EU and Norway, and a corresponding increase in the number of affected policy areas, portfolios and ministerial officials.

If we look at coordination behavior, the findings presented above are further strengthened (see Table 6 below). Lower-level officials regularly score higher

**Table 5:** Percentage of Respondents Indicating that they have been in Contact with\* or Participated at\*\* the EU Level, by Year and Position Level (Low Level (L)\*\*\*/Medium-High Level (MH)).\*\*\*\*

	1996		2006		2016		Average <i>n</i>
	L	MH	L	MH	L	MH	
Contacts with the Commission	74	26	63	37	76	24	100 (115)
Contacts with the Council	–	–	–	–	90	10	100 (8)
Contacts with the European Parliament	–	–	–	–	100	0	100 (20)
Contacts with EU agencies	–	–	73	27	83	17	100 (39)
Participation in expert committees	78	22	70	30	85	15	100 (94)
Participation in comitology committees	71	29	70	30	86	13	100 (21)
Participation in the Council	–	–	–	–	80	20	100 (10)
Participation in boards, committees, etc. in EU agencies	–	–	–	–	72	28	100 (18)

\*The contact variable combines values 1 and 2 on the following value scale: (1) approx. every week, (2) approx. every month, (3) a few times, and (4) never.

\*\*The participation variable uses value 1 on the following value scale: (1) several times, (2) once, and (3) never.

\*\*\*Lower level of employment includes the following: 1996: consultant, chief executive officer, head of department, deputy director (or equivalent); 2006: senior consultant, agency manager, advisor, deputy director (or equivalent); 2016: advisor/senior advisor, specialist advisor, specialist director (or equivalent).

\*\*\*\*Medium and higher level of employment includes the following: 1996: department director, department director general or higher; 2006: department director, department director general or higher; 2016: department manager, department director general or higher.

on all coordination variables over time, both as regards participation in collegial coordination bodies as well as changing their points of views resulting from coordination. The figures also support the assumption that lower-level officials are generally more involved in EU/EEA/Schengen-related activities than senior ministerial staff. This means that ministerial EU competency to a large extent resides among lower-level officials. According to the figures, lower-level officials also report increased participation in coordination committees over the last decade. In particular, we see an increase in participation in the Government Coordination Committee from around 55% in both 1996 and 2005 to almost 70% in 2016. Furthermore, we also see an average increase of 10% in participation in other coordination committees. The trend is similar when we look at figures pertaining to changes in points of views: On average, there was a 16% increase in lower-level officials reporting changes or modifications subsequent to coordination with other entities and actors.

The purpose of the correlation matrix presented beneath (Table 7) is to show to what extent different types of coordination behavior are mutually reinforcing.

**Table 6:** Percentage of Respondents Reporting the Following Coordination Behavior\*, by Year and Position Level (Low Level (L)\*\*/Medium-High Level (MH)).\*\*\*

	1996		2006		2016		Average <i>n</i>
	L	MH	L	MH	L	MH	
Participated in intra-ministerial coordination committees (own ministry)	71	29	62	38	73	27	100 (181)
Participated in special inter-ministerial coordination committees	83	17	75	25	84	16	100 (116)
Participated in the Government Coordination Committee	56	44	55	45	69	31	100 (61)
Changed/modified the ministry's view in EU-related cases after consultation or coordination with the Prime Minister's office (PMO)	63	38	48	52	70	30	100 (35)
Changed/modified the ministry's view in EU-related cases after consultation or coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)	63	37	54	46	73	27	100 (60)
Changed/modified the ministry's view on EU-related cases after consultation with other ministries	65	35	64	37	69	31	100 (82)
Changed/modified the ministry's view on EU-related cases after consultation with the Parliament	83	17	60	40	77	23	100 (20)
Changed/modified the ministry's view in EU-related cases after consultation with interest groups	76	24	58	42	77	23	100 (27)

\*This table uses value 1 on the following value scale (applies to both participation and change/modification of view): (1) several times, (2) once, and (3) never.

\*\*Lower level of employment includes the following: 1996: consultant, chief executive officer, head of department, deputy director (or equivalent); 2006: senior consultant, agency manager, advisor, deputy director (or equivalent); 2016: advisor/senior advisor, specialist advisor, specialist director (or equivalent).

\*\*\*Medium and higher level of employment includes the following: 1996: department director, department director general or higher; 2006: department director, department director general or higher; 2016: department manager, department director general or higher.





This is done by examining whether different types of coordination behavior are considered important by the same respondents. We use the same variables for coordination behavior as in Table 6: Variables 1–3 covers officials' participation in various ministerial coordination committees (Group 1), while variables 4–8 examines effects of coordination – that is the extent to which ministerial positions change due to coordination (Group 2). It appears from the matrix that a relatively high correlation exists within each group of variables, and significantly lower correlation between the groups. This suggests a high probability that the same respondents will either participate in coordination committees or change their points of view as a result of coordination with other actors. Lower correlation between the two groups may indicate that substantial coordination (change) does not necessarily relate to participation in coordination committees. This, in turn, may indicate that the coordination committees are not instrumental bodies for the actual coordination of the EU/EEA/Schengen activities.

In order to determine power relations, respondents were asked to indicate the importance attached to different actors and institutions when key decisions were made within their own domain. Table 8 shows the importance attached to primary and secondary structures during the past two decades (H4). The data demonstrates that primary structures are, as expected, considered more important than secondary structures. This finding is also stable over time. Noteworthy, however, is the increase in the perceived importance of other ministries from 64%

**Table 8:** Percentage of Respondents Considering the Following Institutions Important\* when Key Decisions are made within their Field.

	1996	2006	2016
Primary structures			
Own ministry	95	96	98
Underlying agencies	53	65	69
Other ministries	64	64	72
Parliament	78	77	80
Government	86	90	91
Secondary structures			
Commission	23	29	22
Council	–	–	14
EU Parliament	–	–	12
EU agencies	–	11	9
Average <i>n</i>	100 (1043)	100 (1007)	100 (1340)

\* Combines values 1 and 2 on the following value scale: (1) very important, (2) fairly important, (3) somewhat important, (4) rather unimportant, (5) not important, and (6) do not know/not relevant.

to 72% from 2006 to 2016. Perhaps more interesting in this context is the increase in the importance of agencies from 53% in 1996 to 69% in 2016. This observation can, however, be associated with the increase in structural decoupling resulting from the New Public Management reforms (NPM) (e.g. Verhoest et al. 2012). NPM-inspired reforms led to increased autonomy of agencies, a development that has also been observed at the EU level with the establishment of EU-level agencies (e.g. Egeberg and Trondal 2017). Such vertical specialization consequently created an organizational infrastructure for the development of strong ties between national and supranational administration (Egeberg and Trondal 2009) and a subsequent rise of common administrative order (Trondal 2017). Furthermore, Table 8 indicates a slight decrease in the assessed significance of EU agencies. This coincides with observations in Table 3, which reports a decrease in contact between sector ministries and EU agencies during the same period. This is most likely a result of the agencies' prominent role in European multilevel governance, and thus a corresponding diminishing role of ministerial departments. As mentioned, we observe tendencies that the EU Commission and EU agencies addressing national agencies directly. This may explain the decline in contact with, and considered importance of, EU agencies among ministerial personnel. At the same time, this also means that ministries have become more dependent on agencies in governing EU affairs.

We have, in this study, assumed that actual behavior is mainly formed by primary structures and affiliations (H5). The Central Administration Survey measures the relative effect of primary and secondary structures by asking respondents how they will prioritize if conflict arises between the wishes of their political leadership and the demands emanating from EU regulations. Table 9 shows that most staff (84%) in this situation will seek to balance national and supranational considerations. This may suggest that ministry employees, similar to agency personnel, “wear two hats.” (Egeberg and Trondal 2009). The table illustrates

**Table 9:** Percentage of Respondents Indicating the Following Priorities if a Conflict Arises between the Political Leadership's Wishes and the Requirements of the EU Law\* (Data from 2016).

	Ministry	Agency
Primarily safeguarding the political leadership's wishes	11	15
Seek to safeguard both the political leadership's wishes and the requirements of the EU law	84	68
Primarily safeguard the requirements of the EU law	5	17
Average <i>n</i>	608 (100)	476 (100)

\*The table does not include officials who indicate that the question is not relevant/that they are not involved with this type of cases.

the scope of the EU administration's influence within national central administration, taking into consideration that ministry employees are more closely connected to their political leadership. Ministerial staff are, organizationally speaking, thus fairly sheltered from the influence of supranational authorities. Studies show that agency personnel are more likely to prioritize EU regulations (Egeberg and Trondal 2009), and more closely linked to the EU administration than ministerial staff. However, Table 9 shows that only 11% of ministry employees will prioritize their political leadership in situations of conflict, while only 5% report that EU regulations will take precedence. Primary organization affiliation is thus a stronger provider of cues for actual behaviour than secondary affiliation, however, this also suggests that secondary structures make government officials want to strike balances between conflicting demands and roles.

## 5 Conclusion

This study shows the deep involvement of government ministries in the governance of EU affairs. Government ministries thus serve as an integral part of European multilevel governance. National ministries, not only agencies, are thus double hatted by serving primarily their national political leadership, but EU institutions too. This study adds knowledge on the consequences of a European administrative order in which national central administrations play an integral part. The article contributes to two different fields of research: first, it adds insights on the effects of an increasingly integrated European public administration also in non-member states, and secondly it adds theoretical insights to organizational studies on the effects of primary and secondary structures. The underlying assumption in our study is that organizational structures at the national level filter and modify the effect of EU institutions. This study provides the basis for drawing three main conclusions regarding the importance of organizational factors:

- (i) Organizational compatibility increases the likelihood of administrative integration and coordination across levels of governance. Compatible horizontal specialization at two levels of government aids in the rise of intimate administrative ties and networks across levels. Horizontal specialization therefore makes it easier for Norwegian sector ministries to connect with the EU administration compared to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Organizing according to the purpose principle therefore contributes to reinforcing supranational influence in national central administration of a non-member state.

- (ii) Both intra- and inter-organizational vertical specialization (positional level and ministry/agency affiliation) lead to a loose connection between ministerial officials and the political leadership. This creates relative decoupling of ministerial officials from primary structures and an increased likelihood of reconnecting with other organizational configurations. Intra-organizational vertical specialization is indicated by lower-level officials being more involved in EU activities and also more likely to being involved in EU networks. The data also show that this trend has increased during the last decade. This can probably be attributed to an institutionalization of common administrative structures in Europe, as well as an increase in the scope of the administrative arrangements between Norway and the EU. In regard to the relationship between institutions (between ministries and agencies), agency employees are more predisposed to being co-opted by and connecting to the supranational level as a result of national vertical specialization (see Egeberg and Trondal 2009). This does not, however, mean that the EU's influence is limited to agencies: This study has shown that also ministry employees are central actors in the Norwegian European administration.
- (iii) Finally, the study confirms the importance of primary structures for actual behavior. At the same time, the article shows that officials most often “wear several hats,” which emphasizes the effect of secondary structures. Interaction with the supranational level equips national government officials with multiple reference points for actual behavior. Actual decision-making behavior is therefore the sum of and characterized by impulses from institutions at different organizational affiliations. In summary, the findings show how organizational structure shapes the scope for supranational influence on the central government's actual activities.

What do the data indicate about developments over time? Generally speaking, public governance processes are characterized by stability, which reflect stability in the organizational structures of the central administration as well as Norway's form of association with the EU. There are, however, some interesting changes within this framework. The three main important observations are: In the period from 1996 to 2006, the interaction between sector ministries and the EU level increased, while in the following decade, this interaction was characterized by stability. Second, the data show a steady decline in the coordination of EU-related affairs in the central administration through formal arrangements (coordination committees) throughout the entire time period. Finally, lower-level officials have, over the last decade, increased their interaction with the supranational level. Reflecting organizational compatibility, we find increased interaction between administrative bodies with compatible portfolios

at the national and supranational level. An increase in this trend between 1996 and 2006 is probably an expression of a “normalization” of EU activities in the ministries. Stability in the subsequent decades indicates institutionalization of these activities within the central administration, suggesting some sort of institutionalized Europeanization. This assumption is largely supported by the two other findings: Such institutionalization leads to a reduced need for coordination of EU-related activities. Increased involvement of lower-level officials in EU-related activities reflects the increased scope of agreements between Norway and the EU and further cementing of EU activities in the central administration. In summary, the data do not suggest major changes over time, but rather a consolidation and institutionalization of EU governance in the Norwegian central administration.

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