

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02321-5 - The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy: Europe's Custodians

Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy

The European Commission is one of the most powerful bureaucracies in the world, affecting the lives of 500 million Europeans. In the past two decades, the Commission has found itself on the defensive as its political masters have sought to tame its authority. This book examines the struggle of the bureaucracy to sustain its autonomy from its political overseers. Using a survey of nearly 200 top officials of the Commission, this book disentangles the complexity of this organization and makes a contribution to the study of international bureaucracies.

Antonis A. Ellinas is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Cyprus. He received his PhD from Princeton University and his BA from Hamilton College. He has been a postdoctoral Fellow at the Reuters Institute and Nuffield College of Oxford University and a Fulbright Scholar. He studies political organizations and specializes in political parties, the mass media, and public bureaucracies. He is the author of *The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2010. His work has appeared in *Comparative Politics*, the *Journal of European Public Policy*, and the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, among others.

Ezra Suleiman is the IBM Professor of International Studies and Professor of Politics, as well as the founder and former Director of the Program in European Politics and Society, at Princeton University. He received his BA from Harvard, continued his graduate work at the Universities of London and Paris, and received his MA and PhD from Columbia University. Professor Suleiman has lectured and taught at many European universities and was a professor at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris for more than a decade. He has been a visiting scholar at numerous institutions, including the C.N.R.S. (France), Louvain-La-Neuve (Belgium), Nuffield College (Oxford), the European University Institute (Florence), and the University of Turin (Italy). He has received numerous awards from, among others, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the ACLS, the Fulbright Commission, the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, The American Academy in Berlin, the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, and the Collegio Carlo Alberto (University of Turin). He has published numerous books on European politics covering areas of policy making, comparative bureaucracy, elites, and executive leadership. He has also contributed articles to *Time Magazine*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, *Liberation*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, among others. He serves on the boards of several journals, academic institutions, and think tanks, as well as corporations.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02321-5 - The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy: Europe's  
Custodians

Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02321-5 - The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy: Europe's Custodians

Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy

*Europe's Custodians*

ANTONIS A. ELLINAS

*University of Cyprus*

EZRA SULEIMAN

*Princeton University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02321-5 - The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy: Europe's Custodians

Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107023215](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107023215)

© Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman 2012

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2012

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Ellinas, Antonis A., 1975–

The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy : Europe's custodians / Antonis A. Ellinas, Ezra Suleiman

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-02321-5 (hardback)

1. European Commission. 2. European Union. 3. Bureaucracy – European Union countries. I. Suleiman, Ezra N., 1941– II. Title.

JN33.5.E49 2012

341.242'2–dc23 2011049971

ISBN 978-1-107-02321-5 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02321-5 - The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy: Europe's  
Custodians

Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*For*

*Daphne and Susan*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02321-5 - The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy: Europe's  
Custodians

Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>List of Graphs</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
1. Introduction	I
2. The Autonomy of National and Transnational Bureaucracies	6
3. Surveying Top European Bureaucrats	36
4. Autonomy at the Top of the European Bureaucracy	56
5. Political Attempts to Alter Bureaucratic Behavior	89
6. Cultural Impediments to Political Control	124
7. Custodians of “Europe”	151
8. Bureaucratic Attitudes Toward Controversial Policies	180
9. Conclusion	195
Appendix A: Distribution of Sample by Directorate-General or Service	211
Appendix B: Contact of European Bureaucrats with the European Parliament	213
<i>Bibliography</i>	215
<i>Index</i>	233
	vii

Tables

3.1. Interviewee Sample	<i>page</i> 43
3.2. National Origin of Interviewees	51
3.3. Length of Employment	52
3.4. Education of Top European Bureaucrats	53
3.5. Previous Career Path of Top Officials	55
4.1. Activities on Which Most Time Spent	62
4.2. Main Sources of Information Top Officials Consider Necessary to Execute Their Job or to Formulate Policy	65
4.3. Initial Relationship Between Senior Officials and Commissioners	66
4.4. Responses of Top Officials to Degree of DG Influence Over the College	73
4.5. Relationship of Top Officials with Council and Parliament	76
4.6. Role of Interest Groups in Policy Making	82
5.1. Progress in Implementing the 2000 Action Plan of the Kinnock Reforms	104
5.2. Responses of Top Officials on Whether They Agree or Not that the Commission Is Too Hierarchical	107
5.3. Is the Commission Too Hierarchical?	109
5.4. Is Recruitment and Promotion in the Commission Fully Merit Based?	110



Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-02321-5 - The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy: Europe's  
Custodians  
Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

<i>Tables</i>	ix
5.5. Remarks of Top Officials on Whether Promotion Is Fully Merit Based	112
5.6. Is the Commission Too Rule Bound?	115
5.7. North-South Divide in Question of Whether the Commission is Too Rule Bound	117
5.8. Sources of Obstacles to Accomplishing Tasks	119
5.9. Alternative Reforms Proposed	120
6.1. Is There an <i>esprit de corps</i> or Common Culture Across DGs in the Commission?	132
6.2. Is There a Common Culture in the Commission, by DG Type?	134
6.3. Where Do Innovative Policies Originate?	135
6.4. Is There a Common Culture (by years of service)?	137
6.5. Is There a Common Culture or an <i>esprit de corps</i> within DGs?	138
6.6. Change in Commission Culture Over Time	142
7.1. Sources of Euroskepticism	156
7.2. Vision of the EU	164
7.3. Vision of the EU and National Origin of Top Officials	169
7.4. Years of Service and Vision of Where the EU Should Be	173
7.5. Vision of the EU and DG Type	174
7.6. Position in Commission and Vision of Where the EU Should Be	175
8.1. Was It a Good Idea to Propose a European Constitution?	182
8.2. Reaction of Top Officials to Bolkestein Directive	186
8.3. Support for Bolkestein Directive and Political Orientation of Top Officials	187
8.4. Attitudes to Turkish Accession	189
B.1. Frequency of Contact with EP	213
B.2. What Forms Does Contact with EP Take?	213
B.3. With Whom in the EP Do You Have Most Contact?	214

Graphs

7.1. Scatter plot between “Where Officials Think the EU Stands Today” and “Where Colleagues Think the EU Stands Today”	<i>page 166</i>
7.2. Scatter plot between “Where Officials Think the EU <i>Should be</i> in 10 Years” and “Where Colleagues Think the EU <i>Should be</i> in 10 Years”	166

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02321-5 - The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy: Europe's Custodians

Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## Acknowledgments

This book is the product of a harmonious collaboration between the two authors. The joint effort was rendered somewhat more complicated because they were often on different continents, but it was always pleasant and uninterrupted.

Of course, any work that entails penetrating an institution – studying its organization, its leaders, its multiple relations to other institutions – that functions within an international context and that involves a survey is going to require the help of many talents.

This large undertaking was originally begun by Suleiman. Two Princeton University graduate students, Maia Davis Cross, now at the University of Southern California, and Quinton Mayne, now a postdoc at Harvard University, helped test and carry out the survey, spending much time traveling to and from Brussels. Maia and Quinton contributed enormously to the undertaking in long discussions on the many different aspects of the project. When the survey phase was over, Maia and Quinton needed to devote their attention to pursuing their own careers.

In the course of the work on this project and during its many phases, we had the help of many scholars. At the earliest phase, in clarifying the objectives and developing the survey, the help of Juan Linz was critical. He brought to bear his vast knowledge of surveys and of European institutions and helped us overcome

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02321-5 - The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy: Europe's Custodians

Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

numerous difficulties that we became aware of when we started testing the questionnaire. Suleiman has often expressed in earlier books his indebtedness to Juan, not only for his intellectual help over several decades but for his unstinting kindness and generosity. It is a source of pleasure for him to express his indebtedness to Juan once again.

We called on our friends and colleagues at subsequent phases of the project, some of whom read all or parts of the manuscript. We are particularly grateful to Dinsha Mistree who not only read the manuscript but also helped us clarify some of its theoretical underpinnings. His contributions were indispensable to strengthening many parts of the book. Quinton Mayne also read the entire manuscript and, given his familiarity with the project, provided us with important suggestions and insights. Herma Gjinko was responsible for the bibliography and served as a research assistant during the last phase of the project. Iasonas Lambrianou helped strengthen the data analysis, and Costas Constantinou, Marios Constantinou, and Stavros Tombazos helped clarify the theory. Erik Kuhonta highlighted theoretical linkages of our project with other scholarly literature, pushing us to engage with theories of the state.

We are also grateful to Maia Cross, William Genieys, Sabine Saurugger, and the anonymous reviewers who read the manuscript and not only saved us from errors but also made an important number of positive suggestions. Parts of this book were presented at different institutions and conferences and we benefited from the criticisms and suggestions made by several colleagues, in particular Michael Bauer, Dimitri Gondicas, Harold James, Liesbet Hooghe, Georgia Mavrodi, Sophie Meunier, Andrew Moravcsik, and Caspar van den Berg.

Each of us received institutional help that made it possible to undertake and complete the work on this project. Suleiman was able to begin work on this project thanks to financial help from Princeton University's Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences and from the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice. A fellowship from the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) and an award as a Bosch Fellow at the American

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02321-5 - The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy: Europe's Custodians

Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

xiii

Academy in Berlin allowed him to undertake the bulk of the initial work. A subsequent Guest of the Rector Fellowship at NIAS in 2009 and a fellowship at the Collegio Carlo Alberto (the University of Turin) in 2010 allowed Suleiman to complete the project. For Suleiman, much of the work was thus begun or ended in three marvelous and welcoming institutions where little is asked of you (besides doing your work) and much is given to you (ideal conditions for work and almost no obligations). He is grateful to Gary Smith, the director of the American Academy in Berlin since its founding; to Wim Blockmans, the director of NIAS during Suleiman's two residencies; and to Pietro Garibaldi, the director of the Collegio Carlo Alberto. All devoted themselves to making it possible for Fellows to just do their work.

Ellinas began working on the project as a graduate student at Princeton University and, later, as a postdoctoral Fellow at Oxford University, with financial assistance from Princeton's Program in Contemporary European Politics and Society and Oxford's Reuters Institute as well as Nuffield and St Antony's Colleges. The College of the Holy Cross provided Ellinas with a superb working environment, excellent students, and supportive colleagues that allowed him to work on the book while teaching. Financial assistance from the Research and Publication Committee of Holy Cross in 2008 and 2009, the Robert L. Ardizzone Summer Fellowship in 2010, and a junior leave gave him the opportunity to write. The students in the "European Integration" class taught in Spring 2009 provided useful feedback on drafts of the book. Thanks are also due to Ellinas's colleagues Donald Brand, Loren Cass, Jennifer Lieb, and Ward Thomas, for their encouragement and mentoring at critical phases of the project.

We thank Lew Bateman, our editor at Cambridge University Press, for his professional shepherding of the manuscript through the review and publication process.

Chapters 5 and 7 are based on articles published in the *Journal of European Public Policy* and the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, respectively. We are grateful to the publishers and editors for allowing us to reproduce parts of these articles in this book.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-02321-5 - The European Commission and Bureaucratic Autonomy: Europe's  
Custodians  
Antonis A. Ellinas and Ezra Suleiman  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---