



EGPA/IIAS

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Annual Conference of the

***European Group for Public
Administration***

7-10 September 2021

PhD Symposium

7 September 2021

Permanent Study Group XVII:

Sociology of State: Reforms & Resilience

Call-for-Papers

EGPA Permanent Study Group XVII on Sociology of State: Reforms and Resilience

Research Programme

“Policy coordination at the Top: Questioning the role of political entourages and administrative Secretariat-Generals of the Executive”

After focusing for 3 years on the prefects, commissioners of the government and other territorial representatives of the central state in a comparative European perspective (*Les préfets dans tous leurs Etats*), and for 3 additional years on the “Reason(s) of State(s) / *Les raison(s) de(s) Etat(s)*”, PSG n° 17 has taken a new path at 2018 Annual Conference in Lausanne: we want to explore “Policy coordination at the Top” from an institutional and European comparative perspective.

The Executive Power has always counted among the major research objects of Anglophone political science (e.g. Dunleavy, Rhodes, 1995; Peters, Pierre, 2000; Poguntke, Webb, 2005). But it is not necessarily the same in other national academic traditions. For instance, in France, despite the interest shown recently by historians (Rouselier, 2015; Rosanvallon, 2015), current research still overlooks the structures and processes placed under the direct authority and/or surrounding of the Prime Minister and the President. Although the sociology of institutions, either political (Lacroix, Lagroye, 1992; Lagroye, Offerlé, 2010) or administrative (Eymeri-Douzans, Bouckaert, 2013) has grown in importance within the French social sciences, the staffs of politically appointed special advisors to political masters (the *cabinets ministériels*) remained under-researched until the publication of a multidisciplinary collective opus edited by Jean-Michel Eymeri-Douzans, Xavier Bioy, Stéphane Mouton (eds), *Le règne des entourages. Cabinets et conseillers de l’Exécutif*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2015, whereas the more stable and administrative parts of the “Core Executive” (in the sense of Rhodes and Dunleavy, 1995), referred to as the “*administrations d’état-major*” by Jean-Louis Quermonne (1991), are still under-researched.

Our research agenda, “Policy coordination at the top”, is a step forward, following Panel CS07.01 “Cabinets ministériels”, SPADs & other collaborators of the Executive: the Reign of the Entourages? (co-chairs: Jean-Michel Eymeri-Douzans & Mauro Calise), held at the IPSA 24th Congress in Poznań, Poland, July 23-28, 2016; the series of panels “Between politics and public administration: the reign of the entourages?” organized by Jean-Michel Eymeri-Douzans at the 2017 international congress of the IAS, Aix-en-Provence, May 30-June 2 2017; and Thematic Section n° 40 “Core Executives: do Secretariat-Generals matter?”, co-organized by Jean-Michel Eymeri-Douzans and Michel Mangenot at the French Congress of Political Science, Montpellier, July 2017.

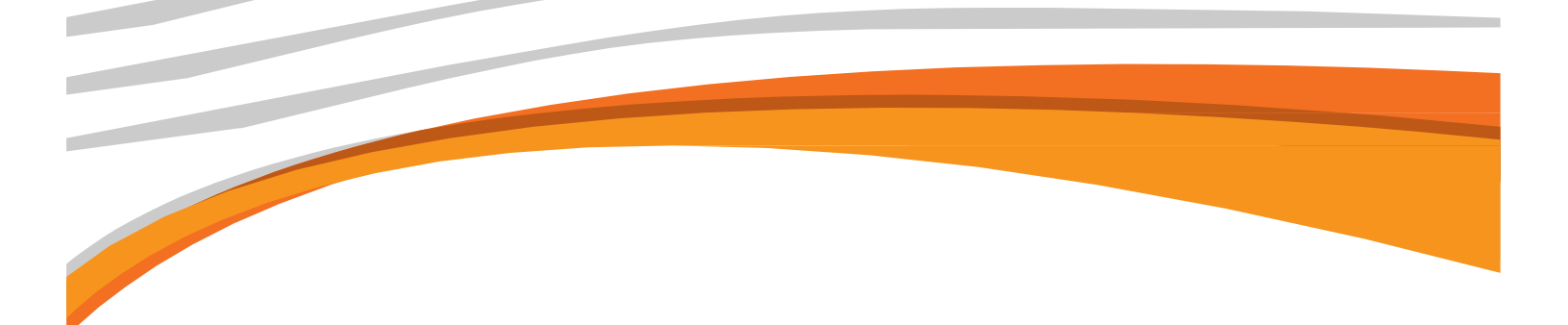
Our aim is to widen and systematize the comparative knowledge upon the coordinating role in policy-making played, within the “Core Executive”, by the entourages of personal collaborators, special advisors, and “spin doctors” who are surrounding Presidents, Prime Ministers, ministers or secretaries (whatever their title is) who still claim that they govern our contemporary polities but appear to rely more and more on their entourages to do so, supported in their attempt to “governing by the centre”

(Hayward, Wright, 2002) by central administrative bodies whose names, size and organization vary substantially (Federal Chancellery in Berlin, *Secrétariat général du Gouvernement* in Paris, Cabinet Office in London, etc.) but can be referred to, generically, as “Secretariats-Generals of the Executive”.

As a matter of fact, first elements of cross-country comparison, limited to Western democracies, tend to support the broad hypothesis of an increase, within the latest decades, in the number of personal advisors of the Top Executive, in the variety and specialization of their tasks, and in their effective influence – a growing “reign of the entourages”. But we need to know much more, and to combine variables such as diverse constitutional architectures, diverse political regimes, diverse administrative architecture of the State apparatus, various types/models of Civil Service. We would like to examine and compare significant cases, so as to better measure the degree of their current (relative) convergence towards a reinforcement of those entourages and/or the remaining (or renewed) divergences which can be observed in these sensitive and still opaque institutional “marches” where the upper layers of the political profession and the summits of the public administration interact constantly. What can we know of the social background of “special” advisors (gender balance, regional and social backgrounds, type of education, former occupations or professions and careers, etc.)? How are they recruited? What is their legal status? How are the staffs organized? How can their role be analyzed in details? What are the features of the daily life of SPADs? What is their real influence and how can it be measured, in its diverse domains and forms? Is an experience within ministerial staffs a resource for later promotions and subsequent careers, or not, and under which conditions? In the context of an increased democratic demand of transparency, are deontological faults, favoritism and conflicts of interest a raising issue regarding entourages? Moreover, a wider question shall be explored: if confirmed by the national contributions, in what respect and to which extent the trend towards a “reign of the entourages” is congruent – “medium or result”? – with some major current transformations of our post-modern polities: increased personalization; presidentialization of all regimes; media hyper-exposure and 24/7 info channels; political time acceleration; multi-actors, multi-level network governance & “overcrowded” policy-making.

In combination, wherever we look, at the nation-states but also at EU institutions or international organisations, or at sub-national layers (regional, provincial, municipal executives), we can observe a trend towards an increasing activity and a reinforcement of these “Secretariats-Generals”, usually administrative by their very nature but in charge of the inter-ministerial/inter-institutional coordination of the production and, sometimes the monitoring of the implementation of public programmes – an activity which connects politics and policies, and obliges them to constant interactions with the politicized entourages of those in power. Our ambition is to develop the academic knowledge about Secretariats-Generals in the EU member-states, and also in the EU institutions and international organisations.

For the moment, studies devoted to Secretariats-General are scarce, to the remarkable exceptions of the Cabinet Office and the White House presidential staff (the latter not being distinct from the political entourage). For example, in France, apart from some personal accounts of former incumbents (Fournier, 1987), and two PhD dissertations (Bonini, 1986; Guiselin, 2015), there is only a recent edition of *Revue française d'administration publique (RFAP, n° 171)* devoted to “La coordination du travail gouvernemental”), with two articles on the SGG, a major actor of the decision-making and legislative process. Biographies of various collaborators of French Presidents are also available, yet no comprehensive research has been undertaken on the institutionalisation and the exact role of the



Secretariat-General of the Presidency, since an old book by Samy Cohen (1980). And what about the situation in other EU member states? Which administrative structures support the heads of government? Can we identify the common elements between them, and the singularities related, e. g., to the tradition of coalition governments with weak Prime Ministers in some countries (several Nordic countries), but majoritarian politics, single-party governments with prominent PMs in other ones (e.g. the UK, France or Spain)?

In the field of European studies, the Secretariat-General of the Council has already been put under scrutiny from various points of view (see Mangenot, 2003, 2010). This is not the case for the European Commission's "SecGen" (Kassim, 2004), which became a genuine presidential administration, or for other institutions and bodies in Brussels or Luxembourg. The central institutions and procedures in charge with the coordination of European affairs at the national level are also to be considered. There is also a renewed interest for the institutional aspects of international relations as proven by Devin (2016) or Bob Reinalda, coordinating a consistent biographical dictionary of Secretaries-General of international organizations.

Therefore, it is undeniable that Secretariats-General deserve more systematic comparative analysis, developed after a set of key questions: which role(s) do SGs actually play? What is the practical content of their coordinating activities, and how it combines, or overlaps, or competes with the policy-advice role of political advisors? What are the real institutional capacities of the SGs, in comparison to those of other institutions with which they interact? On which specific legitimacy, expertise and resources can SGs count when engaging into the constant "turf wars" of policy/political arbitrations in decision-making? Are the biographical trajectories of SGs' officials sharing common features? Are they seconded by their belonging administrations for a while, or recruited politically or enjoying a permanent position? Are the SGs merely managers of formal procedures with little discretion or do they have a real room for manoeuvre? How and to what extent do SGs have an influence on the policy orientations produced as a result of the whole coordination process they handle?

Moreover, it is obvious that the constant working relations and power games, within the Core Executive, between political/special advisors and more-or-less administrative Secretariat-Generals greatly vary from one case to another, and shall be investigated as far as possible, so as to better understand and explain what is at stake in policy coordination at the top of the Executives of nowadays polities.

These few thoughts are indicative. All scholars, experienced or young researchers, from the disciplines of history, public law, PA, political science, sociology, policy analysis, public management, who have original research relating to our topic, or who want to propose comparative, broader, or more theoretic papers, are mostly welcome to contact us. Abstracts can be submitted in either English or French, and accepted papers will be presented in these two official EGPA working idioms.

Practicalities

Important dates:

- ✓ Deadline for submission of Abstracts: April 30, 2021
- ✓ Deadline for notification to the authors: no later than May 25, 2021
- ✓ Deadline for online submission of full papers: August 10, 2021
- ✓ EGPA 2021 Conference: September 7-10, 2021

EGPA 2021 Conference Website: <https://www.egpa-conference2021.org/>

EGPA 2021 Conference Management System: <https://www.conftool.org/egpa-conference2021>

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