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Deutsches Institut für  
Entwicklungspolitik

German Development  
Institute

Discussion Paper

27/2016

# Comparing Structure and Organisation of Development Bureaucracies in Europe

## A Pilot Study of European Aid Administrations

*Thomas Henökl*

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Bonn 2016

Discussion Paper / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik  
ISSN 1860-0441

Die deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-96021-023-8

Printed on eco-friendly, certified paper

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*With financial support from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)*

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**Keywords:** Development policy, EU, coherence, international cooperation, public administration, multi-level governance, whole of government, formal governmental structures, bureaucratic decision-making, organisation theory

## Abbreviations

CODEV	Working Party on Development Cooperation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DEVCO	International Cooperation and Development
DfID	Department for International Development
DG	Directorate-General
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
EUROJUST	European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit
EUROPOL	European Police Office
FRONTEX	European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders
IO	International Organisation
MLA	Multi-level Administration
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCD	Policy Coherence for Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
UN	United Nations
WoGA	Whole-of-Government Approach

## Executive summary

Among policy-makers and researchers alike, interest is growing in integrated and comprehensive approaches to complex problems of global governance. In Europe, current efforts of achieving “policy coherence” and adopting “whole of government” or “joined-up” responses to internal and external crises increasingly involve and entwine both the national and the EU levels in the common performance of tasks. To better understand these emerging networks or “administrative spaces”, we need to study the reform and reorganisation of the multi-layer governmental structures and capacities entrusted with the design and implementation of such common strategies. Whereas existing literature frequently focusses on the institutional context and actor constellations at the political level, the emphasis of this study is put on the organisational structure, interaction patterns and the particular roles of decision-makers within public administrative bodies to identify and explain goal conflicts, diverging preferences and variation in administrative decision behaviour. In doing so, the discussion paper also aims at addressing the theoretical puzzle stemming from the intricate relationship between problem complexity, coordination and coherence in multi-level governance settings.

Empirically, this explorative paper is directed towards developing the framework for a two-dimensional network analysis of national and EU-level development bureaucracies, looking at: the structure and organisation of member states’ ministries/agencies dealing with foreign aid and cooperation; how these entities prioritise and allocate attention and resources; in which ways they connect and communicate among themselves; how they interact with other national government departments; as well as the different hierarchical layers within the EU’s multi-level administration, within international bureaucracies and in emerging global governance structures (United Nations system, etc.). The aspect that is under particular scrutiny is the existence of cross-cutting vertical–horizontal links between administrative hierarchies that, in a reiterated and parallel manner, contribute to the specific network character of the European development architecture.

Combining a twofold analytical focus on several individual agencies and the systemic level of the organisational field, this scoping study aims at giving some plasticity to the multi-dimensional character of the administrative space unfolding between national development bureaucracies and the EU’s external governance system. For this purpose, it develops a theoretical framework for the reform discussions in several aid bureaucracies and draws on an initial – and therefore limited – set of empirical data from EU-level and national decision-makers. The paper also outlines a number of specific questions derived from the conceptual and empirical debates that guide the next steps of the study of multi-level systems, starting with data from the EU level on the one hand, and, on the other, Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden) and the United Kingdom, since these latter countries are generally regarded as the most dynamic and yardstick-setting actors in European – and maybe global – development and cooperation. The pilot study is also elaborating and testing the conceptual and methodological framework to be applied to a more encompassing Europe-wide network analysis, envisaged for the next steps of the project, which is a potentially larger and more systematic comparative study.

Preliminary findings point towards higher degrees of cross-sectoral whole-of-government approaches, increased tendencies towards central steering facilitating coordination

between hierarchical levels, and strengthened private-sector involvement. The detected trend appears to be an international tendency of integrating aid administrations into the wider foreign policy area as well as to more closely cooperate with other domestic policy departments. In addition, crisis leads to a push for centralisation of decision-making at the top of governmental hierarchies. The argument then would be that the opportunity and the desire for the centralisation of steering at the executive core arise from the multiple emergencies currently unfolding: the EU neighbourhood is in tatters, there is war and conflict at Europe's doorstep, and the refugee crisis shows no signs of abating – together, these bring the global problems “home” to Europe. The risk is, of course, that development cooperation becomes a reactive short-term policy driven by contingent events, instead of maintaining a proactive long-term vision.

The evidence collected so far further shows that, if there is a sense of urgency and the political will at the executive top of different governance levels (member state governments: prime ministers, chancelleries, etc., and simultaneously at the core of the European Commission, i.e. the president), this circumstance facilitates a joint effort to push a number of priorities and their efficient coordination also within governance levels (between line ministries or Directorate-Generals (DGs) at the EU level) to reach a common position and to focus on a set of (substantial) policy choices. A crisis-driven centralisation-reflex frequently results in the simultaneous coordination within and between governance tiers (member state and EU hierarchies) and a more “disciplined” approach, resulting in a clearer focus and a reduced list of goals, usually at the expense of complexity and problem-understanding.

## 1 Introduction

Development policy in Europe is in transformation, and international cooperation at both the national and European Union (EU) levels has been undergoing a number of reform efforts to improve aid effectiveness, eliminate paradoxical effects and achieve coherence across governance layers and policy fields. In the European context alone, several reform efforts with a clear relevance for development are presently underway. These are the EU Global Strategy process, the reform of the EU2020 agenda, the debate on the European Consensus on Development and the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy. In addition, the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a frame of reference for policy reform at all levels and across sectors of government. Sustainability entered the global governance debate in the 1990s and 2000s, especially with the increasing awareness of the “wicked” problems resulting from the interference between the simultaneous challenges of social and economic development on the one hand, and climate change and the overexploitation of the planet’s resources on the other. Increasing problem complexity, it is commonly assumed, requires better coordination of policies. In September 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations therefore unanimously adopted a charter of 17 SDGs as the guiding principles, hailing a global and coherent cooperation paradigm.

Policy coherence for development (PCD) has been institutionalised as a central policy goal in the EU since the Treaty of Maastricht (1992), reiterated and spelt out in the European Consensus on Development (2005, to be revised in 2017) and further strengthened in the Treaty of Lisbon (2009). Over the years, several reports have been published by the European Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Most recently, in September 2015, “Better Policies for Development” was released to take stock and sketch out the challenges ahead (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015). The EU congratulates itself for having taken a leading role in the initiation and negotiation of the SDGs, which set the global agenda for cooperation post-2015. In parallel, national and international donors – among them the EU as well as a number of EU member states – have launched their own investigations into improving cross-sector and cross-level coherence, to the benefit of effectiveness and results. In doing so, they have drawn a set of rather diverse conclusions, which in turn form the basis of policy recommendations for administrative action in the field of international cooperation and development as well as different ways of structuring and organising government capacities entrusted with the implementation of such action.

Similarly, also the academic literature has been intensely discussing the impact of particular policies, such as agriculture or trade and investment policies on the outcomes of EU aid programmes (Adelle & Jordan, 2014; Carbone, 2008, 2013; Carbone & Keijzer, 2016; Grimm, Gänzle, & Makhan, 2012; Van Elsuwege, Bossuyt, & Orbie 2016; Verschaeve, Delputte, & Orbie, 2016). Such a perspective reflects the assumption that policy coherence equals the externalities that decisions in one policy area have for the intended outcomes of policy decisions in other policy areas (Nilsson et al., 2012). From a collective action perspective, the defining feature of PCD is the identification of trade-offs and synergies across interacting policy domains that can contribute to achieving development objectives (Furness & Gänzle, 2015; Holland & Doidge, 2012). As a result, policy coherence ought to be best taken care of when policy-makers across sectors and governance levels engage in a process of jointly designing and implementing



comprehensive policy frameworks with strategic objectives in mind, and that both the objectives themselves and the processes by which they are pursued support rather than undermine each other.

What this perspective – focussing mainly on the content of policies – leaves aside is the role and influence of structural elements in administration and organisation that may systematically bias and even predetermine the substance of government action (Schattschneider, 1975; Trondal, 2012). Moreover, the priorities and the particular emphasis of policies frequently change, and coherence is thus left to the mercy of rapidly shifting goals or targets and often coincidental fashions or fads current among given sets of policy-makers in various sectors and at specific points of time. This study therefore draws attention to public administration as a set of governmental structures, providing the organisational support capacities and infrastructure for policy action as well as embodying certain predispositions inherent to administrative action capabilities. Despite the existence of various organisational forms and ways of functioning of development administrations – and the considerable resources they spend to design and implement most diverse sets of policies – surprisingly few researchers have hitherto engaged in a systematic vertical–horizontal cross-level network analysis of aid bureaucracies<sup>1</sup> in order to determine the organisational roots of policy coherence for sustainable development. Existing studies by Lundsgaarde (2013) explore “bureaucratic pluralism” in key OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries, notably by comparing the organisational *locus* of development among line ministries and studying the impact of diverse models on aid effectiveness.

In a similar vein, Gulrajani (2010, 2014, p. 95) emphasises the “organizational components of donor effectiveness” as a key aspect for studying contemporary development cooperation, and employs analytical tools from international political economy, neo-institutional economics, sociology and anthropology to explain how diverse structures and cultures affect and drive the different dynamics of development policy. Clarke, Gavas and Welham (2014) and Gavas, Gulrajani and Hart (2015) look at the bureaucratic structure of individual agencies and engage in lesson-drawing for “designing the development agency of the future”. Gulrajani (2015) examines the institutional autonomy of donor administrations and compares data from Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. What these highly interesting contributions omit in offering horizontal comparisons of selected cases is taking into account the multi-level character of the European development architecture, which amounts to a dense network of agencies and departments whose activities and connections span several governance layers (national, European, international/global development).

The theoretical argument presented in this discussion paper draws on the North American and Scandinavian traditions of organisational theory, underpinned by insights from sociological neo-institutionalism and combined with research on EU multi-level governance and administration (Benz, 2015; Olsen, 2003; Piattoni, 2009; Trondal, 2010). Organisation theory studies formal organisations, defined as “the goals to be achieved, the rules the members of the organisation are expected to follow, and the status structure that defines the relations between them [... which] have been consciously designed a priori to

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1 The term “aid bureaucracies” is used here interchangeably with “development administrations”, although the author is aware that the bodies responsible for policy-making in the field of international cooperation have much wider tasks than distributing aid. In fact, this latter element is about to – and may further – decrease in importance in their range of activities over the coming years.

anticipate and guide interaction and activities” (Blau & Scott, 1962, p. 5). Neo-institutionalist accounts explain resilience and change of rules, roles and identities, that is, of what is considered appropriate and useful in a given context (March & Olsen, 1996). Public policy, and in particular multi-level administration (MLA), studies contribute the tools for understanding relations and interaction patterns between bureaucratic organisations and government bodies. The question addressed here is how the evolution of the supra-national structures and processes has affected policy design, decision-making and functioning with regard to planning and implementation of aid and development at the national level and vice versa. At the same time, how do vertical structure and interaction between levels affect the horizontal coordination and coherence (between countries and) across sectors?

Why would it matter to ask these questions? The answer is that the two levels are constantly interacting and influencing each other; reform trends and fashions travel between them (up-, down- and cross-loading); and, even more importantly, the levels and policy areas constantly intersect (and, in the best case, vertically interlink in order to horizontally complement each other) in the day-to-day processes of designing and implementing coherent development policies beyond aid. By answering the above questions, the discussion paper aims at the more general puzzle of how coordination and coherence relate to problem complexity.

How is this discussion paper going about the task at hand? The next chapter elaborates the theoretical point of departure for the discussion and presents the basics of the organisational argument. The expectations, developed on this ground, are then formulated as hypotheses and assumptions, and – in a section on research design – translated into questions sketching out the sub-lines of investigation, through which the hypotheses derived from theoretical argument are operationalised. Furthermore, in Chapter 3, I introduce sources and empirical data before turning to a discussion of the findings informed by theory. The point of the discussion is to elaborate whether and how the analytical framework being applied to the EU system and a selection of national aid bureaucracies might also serve the purpose of a wider comparative study of national, EU and international development administrations. In particular, the way these entities adapt to new realities of a transforming global order – and notably how they approach fragile states – a growing number of middle-income countries or emerging powers should be of interest in future research. The discussion paper ends on some preliminary findings, summarised in a conclusive section on empirical and theoretical stocktaking, and outlines a research agenda that builds on the developed framework.

## **2 Theoretical departure**

From an organisation theory perspective, the study of bureaucratic structures is central to a better understanding of the decision-making behaviour of public administrations. Based on a careful study of the organisational design as well as of intra- and inter-organisational networks, we can infer hypotheses about their respective influence on individuals’ identities, roles and decision-making behaviour. In terms of policy coherence and coordination, the potential influence of both an organisation’s structure and its position within the environment are critical. As to the former, formal structure consists of (a) an organisation’s vertical specialisation (i.e. the organisation’s hierarchical design and allocation of tasks) and (b) its “horizontal specialisation” (i.e. “how different issues and

policy areas [...] are supposed to be linked together or decoupled from each other” (Egeberg, 2003, p. 159).

Vertical specialisation (a) finds its expression in hierarchical organisation as one of the Weberian core characteristics of state administration and the degree of organisational autonomy, defined as the capacity of a bureaucracy to “take sustained patterns of actions consistent with their own wishes” (Carpenter, 2001, p. 14) or “the capacity to influence policy independently of the preferences of its political masters and in accordance with its own wishes, especially when political and bureaucratic preferences diverge” (Ellinas & Suleiman, 2012, p. 6). Horizontally (b), there are four fundamental ways in which specialisation can take place: that is, according to purpose (sector), process (function), territory (geography) and clientele (customer) served (Gulick, 1937).

The important thing to observe here is that vertical as well as horizontal “organisational boundaries might affect information exchange, coordination processes [...] and conflict resolution” (Egeberg, 1999, pp. 157-162; Christensen, Lægreid, Roness, & Røvik, 2007). The reason is that boundaries will focus “a decision-maker’s attention on certain problems and solutions, while others are excluded from consideration” (Egeberg, 1999, p. 159). Concomitantly, how organisations communicate and connect internally as well as with their “peers” in a given organisational field is highly relevant for their behaviour and their ability to achieve their goals, communicate and coordinate among each other as well as to co-develop consistent interaction patterns and coherent policy-making.

Coming from a different angle, the scholarship on EU foreign policy coherence – or consistency – has seen a revival since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty (see e.g. Gebhard, 2011; Carbone, 2013; Thomas, 2012). This literature, however, frequently ignores the organisational and behavioural foundations that are related to the multi-level and polyarchic coordination conundrum of the EU’s politico-administrative system. The view suggested here conceptualises PCD as the effort of addressing a three-dimensional coordination paradox: 1) horizontal and 2) vertical PCD, that is, cross-cutting policy sectors and spanning various levels of governance (Egeberg & Trondal, 2015); together with 3) a “forward” orientation to meet a number of identified “real-world” needs and agreed-upon development goals. If we add the movement along various timelines – such as the evolution of problems and issues, electoral cycles, changing policy priorities and agendas, sequencing of decisions, contingency and the sheer duration of reform measures to show results – PCD also has a dynamic component of permanent re-evaluation and adjustment (Goetz, 2014; Goetz & Meyer-Sahling, 2009).

It is called a paradox here because in a multilateral environment, that is, involving more than two actors, already the first two dimensions are bound to cause trouble: first, aligning decision-behaviour disregarding divergent purpose and interest may prove to be difficult; second, integrating, co-opting or recoupling separate governance units and administrative tiers is frequently in contradiction with their prerogatives, legal status and their hierarchical principles of functioning. Hence, structurally there are external–internal and vertical–horizontal dimensions of coordination to be distinguished. In public administration research, both vertical and horizontal coordination problems have received considerable scholarly attention through the initiation of “whole-of-government” and “joined-up government” programmes (Bogdanor, 2005; Christensen & Lægreid, 2007; Peters, 2004; Pollitt, 2003). The two dimensions have their distinct characteristics and

challenges; some of them they have in common. Combined, challenges of simultaneous horizontal and vertical coordination *normally* add up and produce increased complexity, hence in a first instance adding to the complexity already associated with a given problem.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the discussion paper examines whether and how these coordination efforts contribute to addressing complex and “wicked problems”, such as frequently facing decision-makers, notably in the context of global public policy, surpassing and/or exceeding established organisational boundaries, administrative levels and competence areas (Christensen, Læg Reid, & Rykkja, 2015).

In response to these challenges, public (or bureaucratic) organisations have been established as powerful providers of capacities and resources, such as finance, legitimacy, expertise, attention, learning as well as executive-, implementation- and operational capabilities in the production and distribution of public goods (Olsen, 2006). In many instances, it is (international) administrations that set the standards, norms and benchmarks that generate values and ideas, and thereby create compliance-generating premises affecting the behaviour of states and non-state actors alike (Fukuyama, 2014; Simon, 1957). The organisational approach to public policy and administration adopted in this paper provides the analytical tools for examining the extent of “independence, integration and co-optation” of development bureaucracies in Europe. Furthermore, the study examines their contribution to the EU’s executive order and governance architecture, weaving into a web the formal-legal and functional lines of command and control as well as the informal, cultural and socialised practices that transcend the member states, thus completing and reinforcing the administrative infrastructure and governance capacities at the supra-national level.

The cognitive basis of such an approach resides in the postulate that, in order to cope with complexity, we create organisations as machines for structuring and simplifying information, for dividing and distributing tasks as well as for executing programmes, with the purpose of coupling problems to solutions (March & Simon, 1958; Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1976). Keeping in mind also that institutions, once established, tend to become “infused with values beyond the task at hand” (Selznick, 1949), we need to add also cultural elements to the equation, thereby allowing us to scope the influence of these different variables on bureaucratic decision-making. Analysing an administrative apparatus thus aims beyond the pure description of an organisation and may allow for predictions about its behavioural potential and propensities to act. “[P]roviding a complete understanding what a bureaucracy is” contributes to explanations and extrapolations of “how certain kinds of bureaucratic behaviours are possible” (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999, p. 701; Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). To explain and predict decision-making by aid and development administrations, this paper applies itself to the organisational characteristics and the environment of such bureaucracies in Europe.

In particular in bureaucratic apparatuses with strong line departments and a strict separation of competences, tasks and communication channels (silos), coordination is

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2 By saying “normally”, I want to emphasise that one should not exclude the possibility that certain constellations may develop the opposite dynamics. Consider, for example, the EU structures, in which difficulties of, or resistance to, coordination within one level can sometimes be overcome by crossing or shifting levels. To define the scope conditions for coordinative obstacles or gains through such up- or downloading of problems, the empirical section cursorily examines some individual cases (although the presented examples relate to problem-avoidance as much as to problem-solving).

often limited to “negative” coordination, by which administrative actors agree to avoid encroaching on each others’ programmes and policies (Scharpf, 1997). This “minimum coordination” implies non-interference to prevent or minimise conflicts between administrative domains. Each department head controls policy and administration within their policy area. This phenomenon is frequently accompanied by “organisational hypocrisy” (Brunsson, 1989), whereby the leadership declares one thing, and the rank and file of the administration does another. Due to a lack of real interest, stakes or follow-up, the announced strategies, programmes or action plans are simply never filled with life. Situations in which coordination and the struggle for coherence is chiefly “window dressing”, meant to display such commitment to the outside, may be particularly prone to negative coordination. To move from negative towards positive coordination by building integrated and coherent programmes, arrangements and services is a major challenge for national as well as EU-level PCD (Bouckaert, Peters, & Verhoest, 2010). In addition, priorities and incentives for coordination may diverge considerably on the two sides of the politico-administrative divide, and at different levels of governance.

At the uppermost level of organisation, governments and international organisations (IOs) are organised according to the principle of major purpose (Gulick, 1937; Egeberg, 2003) and divided into policy sectors. Here is where strategic policy orientations are *normally* decided upon. Due process, power delegation and hierarchical relations are the structuring principles within these purpose-domains or sectors. The task of coordination between **sectors** to achieve PCD is oftentimes pushed downwards in the hierarchy to subordinate administrative levels, coupling administrative sub-units from one department to corresponding units in other departments (e.g. international relations departments, coordination or cooperation units, or, as in the cases of states, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)). Coordination between **governance levels** involves central and hierarchically higher-up government departments at the lower governance level, which are *normally* eager to protect their jurisdictions and prerogatives. Extended and entwined delegative chains upwards from the governance levels may furthermore lead to the loss of accountability and weaken the link to the constituencies at the origin of the political mandate. The weakened (or, for some, missing) link affects the resource base of an organisation in a crucial way: it results in loss of legitimacy, a potentially hostile environment and a constant need for self-justification to prove the organisation’s relevance and to reaffirm its status. Whereas research frequently focusses on the institutional macro-context and actor constellations at the political level, this study puts the emphasis on interaction patterns and the particular roles of decision-makers within public administrations to identify the particular structures, processes and dynamics as well as the consequences of organisational reform.

Based on the abovementioned tendency towards reconnecting, networking and nesting, the expectation would be that cross-sectorally coupled organisational sub-units make “comprehensive” solutions and “joined-up approaches” to implementation more likely. The logic of relations between levels would lead to the idea that joined-up solutions are often a recipe for central steering from the executive core. Nevertheless, the overall policy formulation is done according to the principle of major purpose at the top echelons of the *individual* departments (and, in parallel, at different governance levels). In particular, if policies transcend administrative boundaries, the coordination of approaches may be entrusted to hybrid lead departments, conceived to address “the mismatch between problem structures and organizational structures” (Christensen, Lægreid, & Rykkja, 2015,

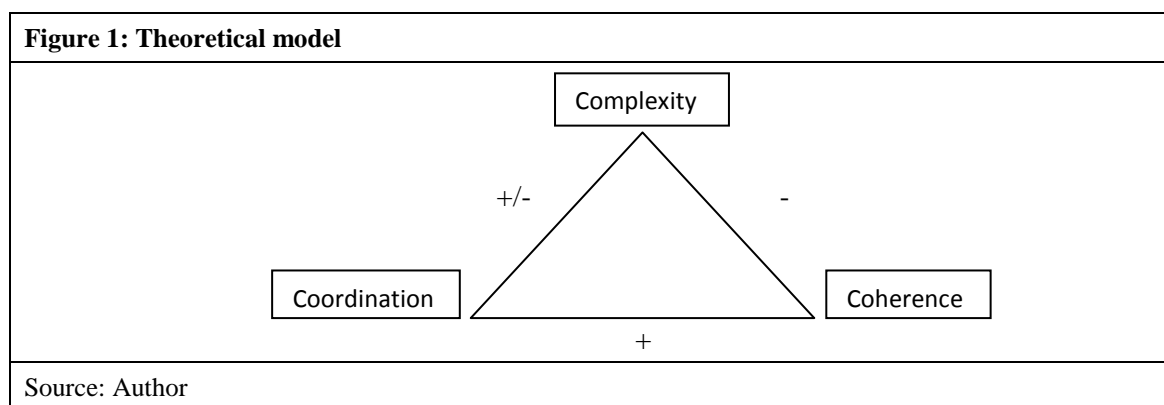
p. 366). If, in addition, preferences and goals of involved actors are persistently diverging, coordination is frequently reduced to harmonising implementation, information-sharing or exchange of best practices. More often than not, the task of achieving coherence is therefore conceived of as a task of improving and optimising implementation practices. Concomitantly, to coordinate the top level of decision-making, ever new strategies to achieve certain overarching goals (sustainability, poverty reduction, resilience, justice, rule of law, democracy, etc.) are elaborated. This assumption fits rather well with the EU as an overarching (or superimposed) governance system, in which new guidelines and approaches are incessantly put forward, with the result that, today, the last thing the EU is lacking is another strategy. It may have more of them than it can manage. The question is rather how to combine them and bring them to life. Crises and decision-taking under (time or resource) constraints may be conducive to the centralisation of steering at the executive core of governance levels and allow for the increased coordination of policies.

Next, chances are that persisting coordination problems will be perceived or reconstructed in a way that makes them fit with pre-existing solutions, frequently non-withstanding the complexity of the “real” problem – especially in a context of limited information, uncertainty and volatility, as in crisis situations when facing the bounded rationality of political and bureaucratic decision-makers (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1976). Such a predisposition could cause an automatic reproduction of comprehensive and joined-up approaches to implementation that have been identified as successful in other policy contexts, as a sort of “coordination reflex”. Since standardised solutions in many instances do not do justice to complex realities and cannot take all facets of unruly, intricate or “wicked” problems that they are applied to (sometimes because of the impossibility to anticipate all potential effects) into account, the policy outcome may not be in line with the intended objectives, and paradoxical results may be the consequence. This is also because of certain role-expectations, conducive to reproducing standard answers to the question “how does the EU as an actor, e.g. as a ‘normative power’ (Manners, 2002), or ‘ethical power’ (Aggestam, 2004) behave in situations like this?” Typically, because of system-inherent mechanisms and predispositions, the EU bureaucracies react by automatically promoting *more* EU action. This may develop into a tendency towards “supra-lateralism” (Keohane, 1990), understood here to denominate the phenomenon of attracting and co-opting the competences and embracing the discursive leadership in the external relations or development arenas of EU-level institutions as a behavioural preference engrained in the EU’s administrative decision-making premises.

In plain terms, the coordination of policy design between Directorate-Generals (DGs) (including internal hierarchies) may be difficult enough, as the coordination is hampered by silo arrangements, lack of communication and bureaucratic politics. Simultaneous vertical harmonisation involves parallel negotiation and coordination that span governance and administrative levels with formal legal as well as informal cultural constraints. In the case of EU PCD, this is all the more relevant since, in the European context, we are dealing with non-unitary actors and a distribution, or separation of, competences also at lower levels of governance – the member states. A remedy to this would require restructuring states and IOs according to the client principle (making the needs of development countries the uppermost principle of organisation) – a rather unrealistic scenario. Alternatively, what is frequently done is to “bridge” the coordination gap by creating hybrid organisations, such as the European External Action Service (EEAS), seen

as a means to achieve solutions to the “coordination paradox” of simultaneous coordination in and between levels of governance (Egeberg & Trondal, 2015).

Since a large number of apparently fitting solutions are readily available in complex governance systems such as the EU, the new hybrids will go and look for how to recombine and reapply them. Bluntly put, the standard answer of EU-level PCD is expected to be more EU activities, more coordination and more co-optation. In this dynamic, the EEAS may function as a *supra*-department or a “lead agency”, with coordinative competence of a new kind, namely “an intermediate form between traditional hierarchies and networks” (Boin, Busuioc, & Groenleer, 2013; Christensen, Læg Reid, & Rykkja, 2015). Figure 1 depicts the connection between three essential aspects of PCD, namely problem complexity, coordination and coherence, whereby more coherence through increased coordination often comes at the expense of complexity. At the same time, however, complexity may also increase via the administrative cost of more coordination.



Finally, particular structural characteristics of international or supra-national organisations or governance systems, such as the EU, may create different incentives for (and put different adaptation pressures on) (sub-)national systems (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Governance architectures, characterised by territorial principles of organisation, may have a preference for tightly integrated, monolithic sub-levels, whereas sectorally organised bureaucracies create incentives for decoupling sub-level structures to allow for reassembling them according to higher-order principles that meet the top-level organisational structure and policy choices. Also political preferences, with regard to the level of integration, may find expression in choices for one or the other organising principle, biasing the administrative decision-making from the outset. Although all of those apply, in this contribution, it is the effects of the organisational structure of the EU’s multi-level foreign and development policy administrations on the implementation of EU action that are of central concern.

Summing up the above discussion, we provisionally generate the following five research hypotheses (or propositions) plus one sub-hypothesis:

H1: Problems of coherence are shaped to match established and learnt coordination practices. (Organisation-structure tops problem-structure.)

H2: Once learnt, a coordination-reflex will be repeated and may “travel” upwards and cross hierarchies, and be applied also in contexts of extended or external governance (as in development policy).

H3a: Coherence is more likely to be achieved if a coordination-need coincides with the opportunity and desire for steering by the executive centre.

H3b: Cross-sectoral coupling of administrative sub-units is therefore a necessary – but not a sufficient – condition of coherence.

H4: Patterns of improving coherence will tend to follow a model emitted by the executive core of governments. Vice versa, coordination patterns that are seen as particularly successful (or legitimate, appropriate, etc.), especially at times of crises, will be “centralised” by the executive core of governments and co-optated from administrative sub-units to the next-higher governance levels.

The objective of a more exhaustive study of organisational aspects of EU and member states’ PCD should be to test the expectations or hypotheses outlined above across a number of cases (policy areas as well as country or regional examples), with the focus being kept on some key points and problems of PCD, such as the reform of objectives, instruments and institutions. Attention should also be paid to the cross-sectoral combination of the EU’s strategies and approaches in view of its foreign policy or domestic interests (security, trade, resources, migration “nexuses”) potentially conflicting with PCD, as well as to the organisational and institutional challenges related to the EU’s administrative capacities and its adaptation to a changing global order (differentiation, prioritisation, flexibility, ownership, etc.) of EU development policy.

### **3 Research design: methods and data**

The present study aims at elucidating the scope conditions for the persistence and change of policy-making behaviour and coordination practices in a large and compound multi-tiered administration (the EU), especially in conjunction with several national-level and boundary-spanning organisations, namely member state development bureaucracies networking and intersecting among each other and with the central EU-level administration. The consequences of such interactions and exposure would be a constant circulation, uploading and downloading of ideas and practices, and the exercise of homogenisation pressures between governance levels and among national agencies.

Putting the spotlight on this double lobbying endeavour may reveal some of the intricacies of the EU MLA: it may at times be possible to convince fellow EU member states to agree on certain means and ends; however, this does not imply that the same approach will be formally adopted as a common policy at the EU level. Even if it is taken up by DG International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) or the EEAS, this frequently represents a return to square one, as the coordination with other DGs has to start over again. This is also the point at which development agendas are confronted – and to an increasing extent confounded – with other portfolio concerns.



Reconsidering the initial problem, we need to assess to what extent organisational design and the resulting dynamics influence the decision-making process and make particular outcomes more likely than others. Next, to learn about inter- and intra-organisational interaction patterns, the study has to focus on which (and how) particular parts of organisations communicate and cooperate with each other. Then, the question of where (and according to which logics) the core priorities for governmental action are determined in different politico-administrative systems needs to be considered. Who are the main emitters of political and managerial steering signals? How are such core priorities and models for action subsequently injected into the sub-unit structures? Which coordinative strategies are used and, consciously or unconsciously, reproduced and institutionalised throughout the network? These questions, which guide the operationalisation of the research problem, are transformed into proxies, such as intra- and inter-organisational communication and interaction patterns, the concerns and considerations forming the main decision premises, as well as data on aid allocation or organisational change and reform.

Such an approach requires a research design that combines individual and systemic levels of analysis and studies individual development agencies as well as the politico-administrative environment and the organisational field in which they operate.

Methodologically, mainly by means of qualitative and interpretative analysis, this study examines both formal rules and structure as well as the informal elements influencing the decision-making process. These influencing factors include contact and interaction patterns; channels and flows of information; the intra- and inter-organisational coupling of administrative sub-units; the attention and consideration given to steering signals; political and management priorities; as well as the role perception and performance of decision-makers and executive or implementing agents in various functions and at different levels of hierarchy.

The role perception under scrutiny here refers to: (1) central EU-level and national agents (diplomats, senior bureaucrats, aid administrators and policy officers) and their decisional autonomy to interpret, prioritise and react to political signalling and guidance; (2) behaviour of decentralised implementing agencies or non-governmental organisations represented by programme advisors, project managers or development workers and field-level agents. This double, top-down and bottom-up research strategy is expected to bring the “real-life” effects of certain decision-making trends to the fore by studying how certain concerns, considerations and patterns of allocating attention and resources affect (to different extents) the actors – at different hierarchical levels and in various organisational contexts – to different degrees involved in policy-making, implementation and evaluation.

As regards the data sources for this pilot study, other than a thorough study of available documents (policy papers, formal acts and decisions, reports, white papers, grey literature, etc.), the present paper draws on a large number of formal interviews and informal talks with national and EU officials working in the area of foreign and development policy that have taken place over the past several years. These qualitative sources are complemented by – and cross-checked against – quantitative data and the witnessing of allocation patterns and prioritisation trends based on available materials from non-governmental organisation, government, EU and OECD (or other IO) sources. In addition, five explorative, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with policy-makers, aid

administrators and programme officers in the Norwegian development landscape. They are introduced as anonymised sources in direct quotations.

## **4 Preliminary findings in light of the theory**

### **4.1 Influence of organisational factors on the decision-making process**

Networked administration and cross-governmental coordination play an increasingly crucial role in the design and implementation of public policy within as well as beyond the nation state (Bauer & Trondal, 2015; Biermann & Siebenhüner, 2009; Kohler-Koch, 2003; Reinalda, 2013). This trend is clearly also mirrored in the field of development policy and international cooperation (Maxwell, 2014; Lundsgaarde, 2013). To tease out the various connections and intersections within and between governance layers, this section looks at the specific network structures that unfold between the national and EU levels as well as between governmental and non-governmental organisations.

From research on EU bureaucracies, we know that the differences between Commission DGs in many instances have been proven to be more important than the ones between member states, as the cleavages and conflict lines at the EU level are primarily sectoral (between the portfolios of development versus foreign and security policy, trade, finance and investment, agriculture and fisheries or environmental and climate policies) rather than national (Egeberg, 2006; Henökl & Reiterer, 2015; Olsen, 2007). Since 2011 a new institutional actor, the EEAS, has been entrusted with coordination and achieving coherence between the different policy sectors. More recently, in June 2016, the EU equipped itself with a Global Strategy to align its external action in view of increasing its impact and consistency.

Simultaneously, also at the national level, “a key aspect of this kind of analysis is assessing the role played by foreign affairs and development bureaucracies in influencing the way that sector-specific ministries provide support in developing country contexts” (Lundsgaarde, 2013, p. 22). The growing importance of line ministries, such as ministries for agriculture, trade, education and health, and, in parallel, an increasing need for inter-ministerial coordination are also corroborated by the present report, which is based on data from Scandinavian countries and the United Kingdom. In addition, documents (reports, white papers) as well as interviews with several officials from the Norwegian MFA and Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) indicate a tendency towards also involving actors from the private sector, frequently on the initiative of these ministries. The expected effect is to create win-win situations for more sustainable and long-term cooperation that is built around profitable projects, job creation and return on investment, as illustrated by the words of an MFA official:

Norway is still rather altruistic as a donor, if I can say so, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also should, that is, it has the mandate to promote Norwegian business interests. We are however only at the beginning of this, and we look to Denmark and the Netherlands as examples. They seem to be more efficient in that. (Interview 4, MFA, Oslo, November 2015)

This complements an assessment by Gulrajani (2015, p. 6), stating that “[b]ilateral aid is often an instrument of domestic foreign policy in which objectives predominantly involve political gain”. Whereas this statement may hold true in individual cases, countries may as yet follow different strategies according to their more or less specific policy priorities or generalised role understandings, but also because of diverging opportunity structures that may take root in the organisational setup.

In a recent interview, a senior official from Norad confirmed the mutual learning strategy but also a sort of peer-pressure among national development bureaucracies:

The Danes are very good at exports, they have some very strong private actors, the Swedes as well. In Norway you have a few big actors, for instance, in fertilisers or the oil sector. Until recently there were few companies, now there are a number of actors in the development market – but we are not as evolved as the Danes and the Swedes. (Interview 2, Norad, Oslo, 5 November 2015)

The Norwegian MFA, in consultation with other ministries (trade, oil, agriculture, education, health), actively promotes a pragmatic attitude based on the claim that private-sector involvement creates win-win situations and more sustainable aid if those private actors stay in the countries and build up businesses and livelihoods: “We have consciously promoted cooperation with regard to national resources management, with the example from our oil industry. There are examples where we work with different ministries, companies and knowledge centres” (Interview 2, Norad, Oslo, 5 November 2015).

Frequently, also learning and evaluation, which again become the basis for action, follow standardised organisational patterns and practices, and are promoted by international bureaucracies (OECD-DAC or European Commission) that tend to be central actors in international development networks. Moreover, comparative analysis of aid effectiveness attributes differences in donor performance to organisational factors (Easterly & Pfitze, 2008; Gulrajani, 2015). The United Kingdom and Norway score high – in contrast to international donors such as Canada, a fact that can be ascribed to the organisational environment as well as the discretionary autonomy in organisational decision-making (Gulrajani, 2015, p. 100). Various patterns of delegation are employed in the individual country cases. Norad is an agency semi-dependent from the MFA and subsidiary to indirect delegative acts by the MFA. By contrast, the Department for International Development (DfID) is a fully fledged ministry with a directly delegated mandate from the Parliament and independent from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Nevertheless, central steering in the name of national interest and overarching governmental policy priorities is not ruled out in the UK case: according to a “Command Paper” by the British Chancellor of the Exchequer presented to Parliament in November 2015, the aid policy of the future should undergo a “geographic refocus” and adopt a “cross-Government approach”, with “more aid administered by other Government Departments” to serve four strategic priorities, namely security, resilience, economic growth and extreme poverty (HM Treasury and the Department for International Development, 2015; Maxwell, 2015). In a Parliamentary hearing on 9 December 2015, Mark Lowcock, DfID’s Permanent Secretary, denied that this would entail British national interest dominating development aid. In response to the question of whether there was “a tension between national interest and development”, Lowcock replied: “This is a false impression! National interest is the same as development interest” (Parliament of the

United Kingdom, 2015). In terms of official development assistance (ODA), the financial figures produced at the same meeting point at giving security-related expenses more weight. The Swedish government has criticised such a focus and calls individual allocations, as done by the United Kingdom's new aid strategy, a "militarisation of aid" (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2015).

This generalised organisational challenge explains a broader international trend towards integrating aid administrations into the wider foreign policy area as well as towards consulting and cooperating with domestic policy departments. Frequently, comprehensive and whole-of-government approaches (WoGAs) indicate the centralisation of responsibilities at the executive core (prime ministers' offices, chancelleries, finance ministers) and delegated to supra-imposed coordination departments (or lead agencies, such as MFAs). In the case of Norway, it is a deliberate government policy goal to alter the mode of development intervention as well as to create incentives for – and build on – models from the private sector (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

The MFA official also notes:

We've seen over the past few years an increasing share of the private sector in development and we do actively try to involve Norwegian businesses. [...] However, the most important criteria for aid allocation are still developmental concerns, in terms of outcomes and impacts but there is an increasing pressure and often a dilemma for ambassadors to promote Norwegian culture, business, companies, and interests, more generally. (Interview 4, Oslo, November 2015, MFA)

In most of the cases studied so far, the lead coordinating agencies are MFAs. Now that also Norway, under the new conservative-right government that took office in 2014, has suppressed its development minister, this is true for all of the countries covered by this study (Denmark, Norway, Sweden), with the exception of the United Kingdom, where the DfID is represented by a development minister in the cabinet. Germany is another prominent example of a leading donor – the Federal Ministry for Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is represented by a minister and is not dependent on, or coordinated by, other government bodies.<sup>3</sup> According to interview sources and evidence in the literature (Gulrajani, 2015), this leads to stronger advocacy and direct ownership of development policies at the most senior level of the governmental hierarchy. At the subordinate implementation level, the German development agency (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ), increasingly sees itself as a WoGA "service provider [to] assist the German government in achieving its objectives in the field of international cooperation", but also offering its services to the EU and UN.<sup>4</sup>

In Norway, the downgrading of the development minister to state secretary level after the 2014 power shift has, according to insiders, clearly weakened the position of Norad and resulted in a tendency to more directly subordinate development questions to general foreign policy (and partly domestic) issues (Interviews 1, 3 and 5, Oslo 3-6 November 2015, Norad and Norwegian People's Aid). The inverse logic may hold even more explanatory power: the centre-right parties have set a clear priority for foreign policy to

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3 Lundsgaarde in his study (2013, p. 10) of German and US development bureaucracies nevertheless detects a tendency towards an "increasing financial and political role of the Foreign Office in the ODA system".

4 See "About Us" on the GIZ website at [https://www.giz.de/en/html/about\\_giz.html](https://www.giz.de/en/html/about_giz.html)

better – that is, more vehemently – promote Norwegian (business) interests abroad. They have therefore deliberately adjusted the departmental structure in a way that makes it easier to instrumentalise development to the benefit of foreign policy. According to the source, it was explicitly the “critical and most progressive parts of the Norwegian development system that were targeted, on purpose” (Interview, Norwegian People’s Aid).

Examining patterns of intra- and inter-organisational cooperation and conflict involves looking at where precisely European aid bureaucracies are situated, and how they behave in relation to other government structures and tiers as well as to outside partners, both among developed and developing countries. The following sections shed some light on a number of issues related to the transformation of EU and member state international development and cooperation policies, namely by asking a series of questions, deepening the theoretical argument and exploring the derived hypotheses.

#### 4.2 How does tight or loose coupling affect intra- and inter-organisational interaction?

A crucial importance regarding intra- and inter-organisational interaction resides in the mode of coupling administrative sub-units, that is, whether they are tightly or loosely coupled with sectoral or line departments, as well as the level of autonomy they wield vis-à-vis the central or coordinating government departments. EU bureaucracies are described as being strictly hierarchical with deeply entrenched separations between policy sectors and competences (“silos”). In spite of several reform attempts over the last decades, DG DEVCO managed to defend its core functions and protect its institutional interest. This is in line with the territorial principle of organisation at the uppermost organisational level with the likelihood of tightly integrated (“monolithic”) sector administrations (see above, p. 15).

By contrast, Norwegian aid administration went through a major reorganisation in 2003 and 2004, when the geographic responsibility for cooperation policy was transferred entirely to the MFA. Since then, there has been no Norad staff in any embassies, and all of the bilateral funding went back to the MFA and is being disbursed through the embassies.

As one Norad official put it:

That decision of 2003/04 concerning the position of Norad was not logical. Actually the consultants employed for this reform, at the time, put forward two proposals, and they said: “Either you merge Norad with the MFA entirely; or you actually delegate more responsibility and more funding to Norad, because there is a certain duplication between the two.” The minister of the time [Hilde Frafjord Johnsen] went for the worst possible solution, mixing the two alternatives, and opted for a hybrid organisation. (Interview 2, Norad, 5 November 2015)

This adjustment had far-reaching consequences for organisational autonomy, affecting the scope as well as the mode of decision-making. According to this source, Norad was recalibrated as a

knowledge organisation, and given additional responsibility in quality assurance and policy advice. Also, the evaluation department was given to us. And we retained management for the civil society sector and academic collaboration. In the fields where we actually were the best, that is, forestry, health, education, energy,

responsibility was redistributed across the ministries and we now work with several actors all over the ministries and, on the other hand, the embassies. (Interview 2, Norad, 5 November 2015)

Implementation is Norad's "third leg". At the bilateral level, the embassies are responsible for implementation. But over the past 10-15 years, the number of bilateral projects has decreased dramatically, to the benefit of multilateral commitments, so that today there is almost no more direct government-to-government budget support.

Looking at an extra-European example, also Canada has reformed its development administration. To learn from other cases, the Canadian government investigated the Norwegian reorganisation as a case study and found that it was not a good model to follow. A 2010 report does not see Norad as good practice: it expresses "concerns about the growing power of the MFA at the expense of Parliamentary accountability" and does not recommend the Norwegian model (Gulrajani, 2010, p. 36). By contrast, this comparative report speaks highly of the UK approach, in which "a separate DfID became a champion of an independent development policy and an important site for inter-departmental negotiations in all matters involving developing countries" (Gulrajani, 2010, p. 37).

In Norway, since the reform, policy decisions are taken outside, at the ministerial level, and Norad is under political instruction from the MFA as well as the environment ministry. Once decisions are made, Norad is compelled to implement them. During the decision-making process, however, Norad has a mandate "to give the best possible advice. We [Norad] are an independent institution from the legal perspective but we are under political instruction. But there is a strong ethos to be independent in our advice" (Interview 2, Norad).

The upside seems to be that, according to the same source, "today there is no power struggle here between Norad and the ministry; 15 years ago there was a power struggle. Now it is only in health, education, and energy where there is a duplication of roles and responsibilities."

The recoupling of units (intra- or inter-organisationally, often combining different policy sectors) may direct attention, and information flows shape the concerns and considerations. Creating predispositions among actors – in the way of certain forms of administrative behaviour and of the decision process – may make *some* outcomes more likely than others (e.g. coupling security and development or development and trade or climate change and development, etc.). The EU, for instance, has long been criticised for the divisions and strict separations between policy sectors, which are a direct effect of the hierarchical organisational structure and its segregated vertical "silos" and competence fiefdoms being positioned next to one another. Partly in response to such criticism and being confronted with (or expected to tackle) ever more complex problems (European External Action Service, 2015), EU foreign policy has more recently been trying to find "comprehensive approaches" to certain problems that bind together different sectors and levels of the organisation in the joint performance of tasks (Henökl, 2014; Hofmann & Türk, 2006).

Once considered successful, it is very likely that an existing solution "x" (such as the "comprehensive approach") gets coupled to all sorts of problems that look likely to match the solution (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1976; Lægreid & Olsen, 1978; March & Olsen, 2006). As demonstrated by empirical research (Henökl, 2015; Henökl & Trondal, 2015),

this behaviour finds expression in interaction patterns, communication and information flows, steering signals, and in the decision premises determining which and whose concerns are taken into account. Such coupling is thus engrained in informal structure and contributes to “nesting” of administrative and decision-making practices (Henökl, 2014). According to a Danish study, WoGAs have been shown to produce trade-offs between political, security and development objectives, but “the establishment of cross-departmental units and approaches does not necessarily entail an encroachment on ODA funds and principles” (Stepputat & Greenwood, 2013, p. 6). The level of variation is high between individual cases, and consequently the jury is still out on what to conclude from these recent governance experiments. The following section tries to identify the deep-stream changes and evolutions in this regard.

### 4.3 Which are the main trends and effects detectable in the policy output?

From research on the Norwegian case and observations from other progressive donors, the main trends and tendencies point towards a common undercurrent of cross-departmental coupling and opening classical development portfolios to more general foreign (and domestic) policy issues.

Even if the most important criteria for aid allocation are still developmental concerns, in terms of outcomes and impacts, there is an increasing pressure and often a dilemma for, let’s say ambassadors to promote Norwegian culture, business, companies – and interests. (Interview, MFA, Oslo, November 2015)

Steering from the centre (prime ministers, finance departments, planning units, etc.) becomes a vital issue as soon as the government decides not to increase the overall (and aid) budget, but to reprioritise resources:

Also the Norwegian MFA is under pressure from the Ministry of Finance, since it has presently over 2000 staff. [...] In Norway, when the government decides to slash the civil society branch of foreign aid, as it proposed to do now, it creates a lot of noise. (Interview 2, Norad, 5 November 2015)

The countries applying a progressive aid policy – often referred to as the northern European countries (Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom) – seem to have much less of a tendency or need to upload their problems and, by contrast, prefer to claim responsibility for their own decision-making. Rather, it may be the case that supra-national structures co-optate coordination and policy-making patterns and knowledge from these countries, if seen as successful and appropriate, in a movement of upward-learning. This observation also corroborates the claim that strong line departments at the national level imply more decision-making autonomy in development policy (Gulrajani, 2015), and it confirms hypothesis two (H2 states that coordination between governance levels involves central and hierarchically higher-up government departments at the lower governance level, which are normally eager to protect their jurisdictions and prerogatives). The stronger the line departments at the lower governance – the national – level are, the more unlikely it is that they will be easily co-optated by the EU level, or that they, by themselves, will delegate policy responsibility or other competences, thereby reducing their autonomy, upwards. By contrast, they may agree to (as a rational choice) or evolve towards a path of coordination (or be pushed into coordination) at the organisational sub-unit level to share and harmonise implementation

practices in order to make their respective programmes more compatible or to improve effectiveness.

Regarding autonomous decision-making and initiative-taking, research on the Swedish case shows an alternative role understanding and behavioural motivation, providing evidence for a different level of ambition and political commitment. Elgström and Delputte (2015), in their study of the Swedish case, highlight a number of mechanisms by which the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) manages to lobby and influence its “sister bureaucracies” in other member states, and to push and upload its own practices and priorities onto the European agenda. It is a set of behavioural principles, best described as the expression of a “logic of appropriateness”, that motivate decisions in international aid allocation.

An actor such as SIDA, which is equipped with considerable decisional latitude for taking initiative and defining the appropriate course of action within the remit of its competences, has demonstrated leadership and progressive lobbying based on moral grounds. Elgström and Delputte (2015, p. 4) find that, since the 1960s,

the fight against poverty has always been the overarching goal, while economic growth, equal distribution of resources and a support for recipient states’ responsibility for their own development were basic elements of Swedish policy, later complemented by environmental concerns and gender equality as additional objectives.

These guiding principles have remain in place ever since 1962, when the main motive of giving – namely to enact international solidarity – had been enshrined by law into a government. Moreover, this idealist motivation was further substantiated by introducing PCD to ensure priority for development versus other sectors and policy areas, such as security, trade, migration or agricultural policy – and rather have them contribute to the overarching development goals.

The future direction of the UK’s ODA, in turn, is questioned by its intention to leave the EU. With the referendum on Brexit of June 2016, the EU has “lost face” internationally and diplomatically, weakening the EU’s material and moral standing as a global actor and reducing its importance as a partner for cooperation. Britain is likely to refocus its development aid to the Commonwealth and its traditional partners, away from the EU’s priority areas. To some extent, however, Brexit could also increase the momentum for progress and reform on the EU side, especially among member states that might have been wary of British positions in external policies. In the short and medium term, Brexit will have a negative impact on EU finances and, consequently, development funding. The depreciation of the pound sterling (which declined 13 per cent against the euro after the referendum, as of October 2016) leaves a financing gap of EUR 1.8 billion in 2016 alone (corresponding to 1.25 per cent of the total Union budget). This is aggravated in foreign and development policy by a very weak euro, which currently has its lowest purchasing power internationally since its introduction – another indication that, with global power shifts and the transformation of development cooperation, also the connection between the internal and the external has become closer. Security, migration, trade, climate change, digitalisation, industry, and economic and social development are all interlinked concerns. Finance and investment increase fluctuation and the frequency of interchange, and politics try to balance and control the globalised mobilisation.



#### 4.4 How does EU-level coordination affect member states' development policies?

In the literature, the concept of “Europeanisation” has been widely used to explain why member states adopt or fail to adopt certain policies advocated by the EU.<sup>5</sup> As is the case in the described Europeanisation-reflex and problem avoidance by uploading, also the mentioned comprehensive WoGAs are a way of justifying centralisation and executive action. Especially at the EU level, this seems to have become the new standard recipe, which officials will produce and reproduce at practically any moment to apply their solution X to problem Y – to do the trick again. At least this could be argued from an organisational perspective, also taking into account that officials may have a tendency to attach more (symbolic) value to an EU approach than there may be in practice at particular moments (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1976; Selznick, 1949). Part of the explanation lies in the EU decision-making process in the field of development policy. The EU’s *acquis communautaire* in this area consists of a wide range of recommendations for the member states to transpose and apply in their international cooperation policies. Usually, the EU Commission proposes these recommendations in its communications, which are then included in Council conclusions. Neither of these documents has a legally binding character, and the stipulations are frequently formulated as “the Council invites”, “the Council welcomes” or “the Council encourages”, as for instance in the “Conclusions on Development Policy from the Foreign Affairs Council of 26 October 2015”, in a passage on PCD:

The Council reiterates the shared ownership and responsibility of all EU actors in implementing PCD. It therefore **welcomes** [...] the five priority areas of Trade and Finance; Food Security; Climate Change; Migration; and Security. In addition, the Council **encourages** [...] setting up the appropriate legal frameworks with regards to PCD as well as by developing and sharing national PCD action plans, also considering the 2030 Agenda. (Council of the European Union, 2015; emphasis added)

The actual debates in the Council are held in the member state Working Party on Development Cooperation (CODEV), composed of specialised diplomats of member states' Permanent Representations. The work of CODEV covers a wide range of strategic policy choices, which are deliberated upon in a “rather informal, friendly, cooperative and consensus-driven” way (Lightfoot & Szent-Iványi, 2014, p. 7). This ambience provides an environment favourable to the socialisation of officials facilitating the transfer of best practices and the travelling of ideas. Traditionally, the agenda is driven by the Commission and, since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, increasingly by the EEAS, which is promoting their own policy solutions, frequently in the form of packages, comprehensive or integrated approaches, and bundles of measures. Here again one may find evidence for the tendency towards promoting WoGAs where they serve the central steering at the EU level.

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5 Radaelli’s original definition (2003, p. 30) of Europeanisation reads as follows: “Europeanization is a process of incorporation in the logic of domestic discourse, political structures and public policies of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms that are first defined in the EU policy processes.”

Recently, we have been witnessing a new EU security WoGA, which entails an increased level of direct cross-border involvement of security authorities, thus the tight coupling of sectors traditionally at the core of member state competences. At the EU level, the border protection agency (FRONTEX), with reinforced capacities and in cooperation with the European Police Office (EUROPOL) and the European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit (EUROJUST), which in turn links to national police bodies, is envisaged to operate as a sort of "joint" between internal and external security provisions related to the areas of migration, border protection, policing and terrorism, in- and outside the Union territory (Council of the European Union, 2015). Chances are that the security focus at the EU level will, via isomorphism and mimicry, find its way also onto the agenda of lower-level governance bodies.

## 5 Conclusions

This discussion paper was conceived of as an explorative study into the potential of adopting an organisational approach to the administration of international development and cooperation. Driven by theoretical insights from MLA and network governance, an original conceptual framework for such a study has been tailored and applied to a pilot set of empirical cases. This format and the early stages of the project, which suffer from a shortage of empirical data, clearly have limitations. The testing of the research hypotheses was therefore not a rigorous and systematic process, but rather a discussion, reconcilable with the format. The overall assessment is that the chosen research design is promising and may be conducive to a much deeper understanding of how development bureaucracies in Europe behave; how they decide, prioritise and allocate resources; how they evolve and adapt to change; and how they respond to challenges and opportunities in their environments.

In response to the questions of whether and how bureaucratic structures and processes affect policy design, decision-making and functioning with regard to planning and implementation of aid and development at the national level, the discussion paper collected empirical material documenting the importance of organisational variables. Concerning the influence of vertical structure and interaction between levels on the horizontal coordination and coherence, preliminary findings point towards growing degrees of cross-sectoral WoGAs, increasing tendencies towards central steering facilitating coordination between hierarchical levels and strengthened private-sector involvement. Another detected undercurrent appears to be a broad international movement towards integrating aid administrations into the wider foreign policy arena as well as towards cooperating more closely with other domestic policy departments.

Negative coordination, both across levels and sectors of government, is usually less conflicted and therefore easier to achieve. The paper could not *prove* this claim but gathered a number of hints that this is the case and that it may hold true in an expanded comparative sample. In fact, empirically proving this hypothesis may turn out to be trickier than it first looks. It would require a rather sophisticated research design to select and account for cases where no interference has taken place, despite the potential, but where this happened randomly, and not because of negative coordination.

Next, coordination between governance levels involves central and hierarchically higher-up government departments at the lower governance level, which are normally eager to protect their jurisdictions and prerogatives. This has been demonstrated and identified as a reason for coordination problems at the European level, and as an obstacle to further shifting development policy competences away from the member states. The discussion paper presented some evidence that a confirmed role understanding and a strong position within national governments may help aid bureaucracies to defend their turf vis-à-vis higher-order governance levels, such as the EU. In more detail, and related to the original hypotheses, the findings produce the following results.

**H1** postulated that problems of coherence are shaped to match established and learnt coordination practices. As we have seen in the studied cases, the mechanisms through which bureaucratic processes materialise are routines, repertoires for actions, ways of doing things, standard operating procedures, etc. Routinised ways of acting matter because they determine how issues are *usually* dealt with; how they are framed and problematised; which – and how – issues are prioritised, emphasised and categorised; whether and how resources are mobilised; who is tasked; by whom and how action is planned, launched and synthesised (combining, directing and sequencing means and ways to achieve a certain objective). Organisations usually get very good at things they repeat very often. Naturally, they will seek to repeat their successes; therefore, they try to do what they do best, over and over again.

**H2** stated that, once learnt, a coordination-reflex will be repeated and may “travel” upwards and across the hierarchies, and be applied also in contexts of extended or external governance (as in orchestration). A generalised trend towards joined-up and integrated solutions has been identified in the examples included in this study. As has been pointed out, the coupling of administrative sub-units creates a number of functional nexuses that also affect the policies between policy areas they are repeatedly applied to, such as links between development and domestic and international security issues, trade and finance, environment, climate, etc. Finally, this reiterated and patterned coordination-reflex ends up as being institutionalised in WoGAs and integrated strategy.

**H3a** put forward that coherence is more likely to be achieved if a coordination-need coincides with the opportunity and desire for steering by the executive centre. Evidence shows that if there is “political will” (or a strong preference structure) at the executive top of different governance levels (member state governments: prime ministers’ offices, chancelleries, lead agencies, etc., and at the core of the Commission, i.e. support by the president, and/or the Secretariat-General), this facilitates a joint effort to push a number of priorities and their efficient coordination also within governance levels (between line ministries and between DGs or EU-level agencies) to focus on a set of substantial policy choices. The empirics further indicate that simultaneous coordination within and across government levels is even more complex. To make it happen, a substantially compelling incentive structure and an operationally successful cross-sectoral coupling at the sub-unit level are crucial; however, as we have seen in the EU case, without strong central steering at the executive cores of all involved governance layers, it is highly unlikely to be achieved.

**H3b** seconded, as a corollary, that cross-sectoral coupling of administrative sub-units is a necessary – but not a sufficient – condition of coherence. This follows logically from the

above, but it could not in itself be empirically proven with the data accessed so far. If we speculate on the basis of the findings presented here and cross-check these observations with insights from earlier research that has shown how integrating bureaucratic structures “pushes conflicts downwards in the hierarchy” (Hult, 1987; Egeberg, 2006), one may derive the assumption that coherence achieved through sub-unit coupling, sooner or later, entails a need for central-level decision-making and conflict resolution, or maybe a reallocation of competences.

**H4** suggested that patterns of improving coherence will tend to follow a model emitted by the executive core of governments, where the higher governance level usually takes the lead. In the cases studied, several models have been seen travelling in different directions throughout the networks, and most often a dominant, centrally designed model is imposed on or imitated by organisational sub-levels. Bureaucratic organisations are founded on the principles of hierarchy and due process, formalised as sets of rules, and manifest as quotidian organisational practices. Accordingly, the examined cases lead to the idea that if there is a perceived need for steering at the centre of different governance levels, central signalling, with regard to priorities, attention and action-orientation, will reach the sub-levels of government and facilitate the spread of the dominant model.

Concomitantly, coordination patterns that are considered particularly successful (or legitimate, appropriate, fashionable), especially at times of crisis, will be centralised by the executive core of governments and co-opted from administrative sub-units to the next-higher governance levels. In line with this assumption, we have seen that crisis pushes towards the centralisation of decision-making at the top of governmental hierarchies. The argument here is that the opportunity and the desire for the centralisation of steering at the executive core arises out of the emergencies that the EU and the member states are confronted with in various international contexts (e.g. refugee crisis). If there is a sense of emergency, central steering overrides sub-unit autonomy, and whereas before there were long laundry lists of preferences (put together by adding the wishes of all sorts of actors), the crisis-driven centralisation-reflex has helped the simultaneous coordination within and between member states and EU hierarchies, which requires a more “disciplined” approach, resulting in a clearer or narrower focus and a reduced list of goals. We may thus infer that central coordination requires – or at least benefits from – a reduction in complexity. The quest for coherence is therefore likely to increase the level of abstraction from real-world problems and to make problem structures fit organisational structures, rather than the other way round.

In order to avoid conflict over jurisdictions, coherence is often conceived of as a task of harmonising, improving and optimising *implementation* practices rather than policy formulation. The data accumulated so far does not contradict this hypothesis and illustrates it at the EU level, where overall policy planning is entrusted to the EEAS as the lead agency, and DG DEVCO focusses on programming, implementation and reporting.

The findings indicate that, if there is a sense of urgency and political will at the executive top of different governance levels (member state governments: prime ministers, chancelleries, etc., and simultaneously at the core of the Commission, i.e. the president), this circumstance facilitates a joint effort to push a number of priorities and enhanced coordination also within governance levels (between line ministries and between DGs at the EU level) to reach a common position and to focus on a set of (substantial) policy

choices. A crisis-driven centralisation-reflex frequently results in the simultaneous coordination within and between governance tiers (member state and EU hierarchies) and a more “disciplined” approach, resulting in a clearer focus and a more narrowly defined list of goals, usually at the expense of complexity and problem-understanding.

Similar observations nowadays seem to hold true in the Norwegian case regarding the coordinative role of Norad, which, after a major organisational reform, has been reduced to questions of advice, implementation and learning. Policy-design proper, by contrast, has been centralised at the higher ministerial levels, which, according to the sources, also reduced conflicts and power struggles.

## **6 Future research agenda**

Further avenues and questions for research to explore, with relevance to aid and development bureaucracies embedded in the wider EU external action context, are manifold and should expand our knowledge on the precise effects of individual structural characteristics and interaction modes on policy-making and implementation. Research could, for instance, explore how modes of interaction in different systems evolve and change over time; to what extent political objectives, national administrative traditions, influencing factors from the organisational field or diffusion through Europeanisation affect this evolution; or how lasting the effects of reform and adjustments due to crisis and emergency situations are.

In this regard, a useful exercise might be to map the developments in the sector over the last 5 to 10 years and to detect main trends of divergence or convergence, certain development paths as well as openness and resistance to change. This may also contribute towards assessing which organisational forms may equip different development agencies with comparative advantages or disadvantages in the pursuit of their objectives. More attention should be paid to the respective roles of hierarchies vs. networks and the importance of the organisational resource base. This may necessitate the combined use of systemic and individual levels of analysis, and a blend of instruments and measures to enlarge and improve empirical data sources. At the individual level, research might, for example, ask which are the premises for decision that are ultimately determining policy choices, and what are the roles of decision-makers and agents in the design and implementation of development policies and programmes?

At the systemic level, research may address the questions: What are the main patterns and determinants of aid allocation in different organisational contexts? To what extent are these allocation decisions affected by political objectives, international trends/fashions or external, factual vs. internal, bureaucratic dynamics?

Yet other, more empirically-orientated or case-driven research questions may include:

- How do incumbents at the politico-administrative interface influence the policy process? What are distinct interaction patterns at the politico-administrative divide in different countries/systems?
- To what extent has reform been based on sound analysis vs. driven by politics (or fashions)? Similarly, which (allocation) decisions, principles and standard operating

procedures are rooted in a rational cost-benefit calculus vs. politically influenced, or in tradition/path-dependency, fashion?

- Could, for example, the use and spread of “evidence-based aid allocation” (e.g. DfID) be seen as an indicator for changing management practices and transforming aid administrations?
- To what extent do the EU and member states combine aid and commercial policies, or involve private actors from industry and services as levers for influence? What are the roles and effects of increased private-sector involvement in development policy?
- How does the EU’s approach to regional development strategies evolve (e.g. in the European neighbourhoods, Africa, the African, Caribbean and Pacific States, Asia, and Latin America)? Which patterns can we discern, especially with regard to middle-income countries in these regions?
- How to detect potential effects and assess the impact of coherence? What are tangible and measurable outcomes of this tendency towards joined-up and comprehensive strategy, and a corresponding evolution/transformation of policy-making patterns in development? What does it do to the EU as a political system more broadly?
- What can we predict about future reform trends, and what are commonalities or differences in reorganising aid bureaucracies across Europe – at the EU and member state levels?

A first step should extend and refine the comparative study of a larger number of country cases, selected according to independent variables such as national administrative tradition, resource situation and exposure to competitive or isomorphistic pressures.



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