

WHICH HAMMER BREAKS THE GLASS CEILING?

WOMEN IN POSITIONS OF DECISION-MAKING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Despite some thirty years of equal opportunity measures and considerable progress made, the simple formula “the higher the fewer” is still an accurate description of the status of women across a broad range of political organizations. Bureaucracies are certainly no exception, and much research has pointed toward the policy consequences that stem from non-representative organizations.

This paper examines the structure and location of barriers to women’s advancement in organizations, as well as the relative impact of policies aimed at breaking down said barriers and increasing the number of women in decision-making positions. In particular, it focuses on the role of ‘gender mainstreaming’ in transforming organizational culture. The argument here is that by altering and focusing decision-makers’ perceptions of the impact of policies on women and men outside the organization, through training and learning, they will become more aware of the gendered social patterns in their immediate environment within the organization and will subsequently be more willing to transform these patterns.

The administration of the European Commission serves as an excellent case to examine this question. Across a time span of 25 years, the relative impact of three distinct equal opportunity strategies, equal treatment, positive action and gender mainstreaming, will be compared across the organization as a whole. Secondly, a comparison across a number of Directorate Generals helps examine the extent to which an increase in the number of women in decision-making positions is dependent on the degree to which gender mainstreaming policies were implemented and enforced, while taking into account additional factors identified as important in the literature. Those include, among others, the dominant policy and professional frame an organization operates under, the level of hierarchy and centralization, and the presence of a critical mass or numerical threshold of women.

The systematic comparison of these policy packages builds on the growing number of studies that find non-discrimination and affirmative action programs to have only limited impact on the proportion of women in highest positions of decision-making. Beyond this, the paper presents a first assessment of the impact that gender mainstreaming can have on the *internal* procedures and culture of an organization. Finally, by identifying and evaluating factors that facilitate or mitigate policy success, the paper also speaks to the literature on the relationship between passive and active representation in political organizations.

Feedback and Comments Welcome!
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Joerg Wittenbrinck
Department of Political Science
University of Toronto
100 St. George Street, R 3038
Toronto, ON, Canada
M5S 3G3
joerg.wittenbrinck@utoronto.ca

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1 Introduction: Women in Decision-Making – Empirical and Normative Considerations¹

The notorious under-representation of women in positions of decision-making across all forms of organizations has been an issue of both political science scholarship and real world activism for some thirty years now. In the United States, non-discrimination laws have been in place since the 1960s and affirmative action programs were enacted in the early 1970s². In Europe, second-wave feminists have particularly used the European Union as an opportunity structure to advance women's legal and substantive status³. However despite long established formal equality and multiple efforts by governments and societal groups to increase the career prospects of women, many organizations seem to have a *glass ceiling* built into their organizational structure. The expansion of formal rules has opened organizations to women and allowed for their subsequent advancement within them, but only to a certain point on the career ladder. Beyond this informal barrier (the glass ceiling), the number of women entering positions of decision-making seems to be less a matter of structural change in organizations than a matter of tokenism.⁴

As Elisabeth Gidengil and Richard Vengroff have demonstrated, this general phenomenon cannot be explained by either the *supply thesis*, which supposes that not enough qualified women are available for highest positions of decision-making, nor by the *socialization thesis*, which holds that not as many women actually desire these positions.⁵ Their study of department heads of municipal governments in Quebec between 1985 and 1995 shows that while affirmative action programs did help to increase the overall number of women employees, they had no significant impact on the number of women department heads.⁶ They conclude that “the glass ceiling seems to be stubbornly resistant to government actions to dislodge it.”⁷

Neither do macro-cultural or structural factors provide a full picture of what explains the variation in the number of women in highest positions of decision-making. In a comparative study of 28 countries Alan Siaroff identifies what factors account for the variation in the number of women in parliaments and cabinets.⁸ The most significant explanatory variables that Siaroff was able to isolate were whether a polity has a ‘socialist’ welfare state regime, whether it is predominantly Protestant, and whether it has granted universal suffrage early in the twentieth century (206-7). Gidengil and Vengroff when treating city size, levels of education, income and others as independent variables, find no more than random variation within the same polity, which they label “deceptive”.⁹ Clearly, these indicators of cultural traits and structural factors external to organizations will influence the mechanisms at work

¹ I would like to thank Sylvia Bashevkin, Gina Cosentino, Ece Göztepe-Celebi, Larry LeDuc, Grace Skogstad, Luc Turgeon, and Linda White for valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper and Liesbet Hooghe for making available the impressive dataset derived from interviews with and survey data of more than one hundred senior Commission officials. All mistakes, of course, are mine alone.

² Katherine C. Naff, *To Look Like America: Dismantling Barriers for Women and Minorities in Government*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001) 17-9.

³ Sonia Mazey, *Gender Mainstreaming in the EU: Principles and Practice*. (London: Kogan Page, 2001) 19. For the purpose of simplification, I will use the term “European Union” (EU) even for institutions and policies before 1993. This appears to be common practice in the literature.

⁴ “The equality of men and women in a matter of political rights is established by a large number of constitutions, codes, and laws,” Maurice Duverger wrote, timely both then and now, in 1955. “How far do the facts square with the law? To what extent is the legal equality of the sexes accompanied by real equality?” Maurice Duverger *The Political Role of Women* (Paris: UNESCO, 1955).

⁵ Elisabeth Gidengil and Richard Vengroff, “Representative Bureaucracy, Tokenism and the Glass Ceiling: The Case of Women in Quebec Municipal Administration” *Canadian Public Administration* 40 (1997) 457-80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 471.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 475.

⁸ Alan Siaroff, “Women’s representation in Legislatures and Cabinets in Industrial Democracies” *International Political Science Review* 21 (2000) 197-215. For a similar study see Andrew Reynolds, “Women in Legislatures and Executives of the World: Knocking at the Highest Glass Ceiling,” *World Politics* 51 (1999).

⁹ Gidengil and Vengroff, “Representative Bureaucracy, Tokenism and the Glass Ceiling” 476.

within organizations. But cross-national similarities in the under-representation of women in political and other institutions¹⁰ suggest the existence of distinct *internal* organizational mechanisms.

For meaningful explanations of the under-representation of women in highest positions of decision-making, the internal mechanisms at work have to be studied as well. Furthermore, my research question concentrates on the prospects for institutional change of different strategies to promote gender equality. *Which strategies to foster the advancement of women into highest positions of decision-making have been successful and which have not?*

The administration of the European Commission serves as an excellent case to examine this question. Over the past three decades, three distinctive strategies employed to tackle gender inequality (equal treatment, positive action and gender mainstreaming) can be delineated and compared with respect to their impact on the number of women in decision-making positions. With regard to the *glass ceiling* the focus will be on substantive gaps between highest positions of decision-making and middle management that would point toward an informal barrier embedded in the organization's structure. The Commission's administration is sufficient in size, which will make it possible to measure variation within the Commission by comparing Directorate Generals (roughly similar to national government departments) with one another.

As will be elaborated further below (2.3), the latest strategy of *gender mainstreaming*, a policy innovation that demands for the systematic incorporation of gender concerns at all levels of policy-making, is expected to have the most substantial impact on breaking the glass ceiling. While equal treatment and positive action policies, including quotas, which are aimed at more formal barriers, are likely to increase the overall number of women in an organization, gender mainstreaming offers the most comprehensive approach and is therefore more likely to tackle informal barriers at an organization's top levels.

In normative terms, the importance of representative bureaucracies for democratic governance has been a topic in the academic literature since the 1940s. A civil service that is representative of the overall population offers more opportunities for traditionally disenfranchised groups to have an input into the decision-making process.¹¹ Symbolically, mirror representation increases the legitimacy of and responsiveness to political institutions. The question of women in highest positions of decision-making is therefore not only relevant as a matter of formal fairness. It reaches much higher importance when one accepts the rationale that the increase of women in decision-making positions beyond token numbers will beyond a substantially increase in the representativeness and legitimacy of an organization also likely transform general politics and policy-making. Questions of gender are always fundamentally questions of power and thereby inseparably linked to governance in the European Union.¹² The question of a representative EU administration therefore represents yet another facet of the European Union's 'democratic deficit'.

The adequate response to gender imbalances in bureaucratic thinking and behaviour, finally, has been an issue of contention. Kathy Ferguson makes "The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy" and asserts that feminists have little to hope for in any organization shaped by bureaucratic discourse.¹³ Others, with whom as will become clear in this paper I concur, have followed Ferguson's

¹⁰ See for example Almut Borggrefe et al., *Women in Political Decision-Making Positions*. (Berlin: European Database – Women in Decision-Making, FrauenComputerZentrumBerlin, 2000).

¹¹ Naff, *To Look Like America* 1.

¹² Jo Shaw, "European Union Governance and the Question of Gender: A Critical Comment" *Jean Monnet Working Paper* (New York University School of Law: No. 6/ 2001). In its White Paper, the Commission defines 'governance' as "rules, processes and behaviour that affect the way in which powers are exercised at the European level, particularly as regards openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence" European Commission, *European Governance – White Paper* (Brussels: COM(2001) 428 final) 8 n1.

¹³ Kathy Ferguson, *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984).

empirical analysis and critique, but in prescriptive terms conclude that positive change is possible and bureaucratic institutions can indeed be agents of feminist change.¹⁴

Gender mainstreaming, is surprisingly en vogue not only in feminist, but also in more mainstream political science and public policy scholarship. A number of studies are now available that assess the strategy in principle. At least two recent special issues in academic journals have been compiled.¹⁵ Few have assessed the success of the recent wave of gender mainstreaming¹⁶ empirically, though, mainly for lack of empirical data. The present study is to my knowledge the first attempt to systematically assess the impact of gender mainstreaming on the representation of women *inside* the European Commission. It therefore aims to contribute to both the literature on gender mainstreaming as well as the long neglected and now growing empirical study of the “inner life of the European Commission.”¹⁷ Although equal opportunity measures have had overall considerable (and documented) impact within member states, “the record of the EU in relation to its own administration has not been a distinguished one”¹⁸. The number of women in the EU civil service who are in positions of decision-making has remained low. A number of commentators have recently complained about the vagueness and underdevelopment of the concept.¹⁹ This paper therefore also aims at clarifying the conceptual links between the set of strategies termed ‘gender mainstreaming’ and organizational change in bureaucratic environments.

Gender mainstreaming is an integral part of the of the succession and expansion of EU equal opportunity policies. It is a potentially radical approach, but it is also a relatively soft policy approach, which could be easily watered down and which may prove difficult to implement effectively.²⁰ Earlier attempts integrating gender widely into policy-making in a number of countries, including Canada and the Netherlands in the 1970s, proved particularly unsuccessful.²¹ Has the Commission’s commitment to gender equality and mainstreaming been mostly lip service, or is it backed by substantial political will? The discussion here will not so much cover *why* gender mainstreaming emerged as a strategy at the level of the European Union, but what its effects were on the number of women in positions of decision-making in the European Commission. The effects, however, may permit some reflection on the commitment to gender equality.

The focus of this paper lies on the development of testable hypotheses. For this purpose, the relevant context of equal opportunity measures in the Commission and of its civil service will be first laid out. Particular attention will also be paid to the conceptual link between gender mainstreaming and the expected increase in the number of women in decision-making positions. Subsequently (Part 3), more specific hypotheses will be used to examine the impact that those strategies have had on the representation of women in the European Commission. As so often, the data may be consistent with a number of theoretical explanations. I will therefore discuss and examine a number of alternative

¹⁴ Joyce Gelb, “Book Review: The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy,” *Political Science Quarterly* (1986) 160-1.

¹⁵ *Journal of European Public Policy* 7:3 (2000), edited by Sonia Mazey, and *Feminist Legal Studies* 10 (2002), edited by Fiona Beveridge and Jo Shaw.

¹⁶ Jacqui True and Michael Mintrom find that “the speed with which these institutional mechanisms have been adopted by the majority of national governments is unprecedented.” “Transnational Networks and Policy Diffusion: The Case of Gender Mainstreaming,” *International Studies Quarterly* 45 (2001) 51.

¹⁷ Jarle Trondal, “The ‘Parallel Administration’ of the European Commission: National Officials in European Clothes?” *ARENA Working Paper* (No. 25/ 2001).

¹⁸ Anne Stevens, *Brussels Bureaucrats? The administration of the European Union*. (with Handley Stevens, Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001) 112.

¹⁹ e.g. Shaw, “European Governance and the Question of Gender”.

²⁰ Sonia Mazey, “Introduction: Integrating Gender – Intellectual and ‘Real World’ mainstreaming.” *Journal of European Public Policy* 7 (2000) 333-45.

²¹ Mieke Verloo, “Another Velvet Revolution? Gender Mainstreaming and the Politics of Implementation,” *IMW Working Paper* No.5 (2001).

accounts in Part 4. In conclusion, I will provide some thoughts on the significance of the findings and the generality of the model proposed here.

2 Developing Hypotheses: Equal Opportunities, the Civil Service and Organizational Change

2.1 Progress in Stages: EU Equal Opportunity Strategies since 1975

The European Communities and the European Union have been a “favourable opportunity structure, or alternative policy-making arena” for issues of gender equality, particularly in the context of questions concerning employment²². Without elaborating on *why* this has been the case, a task beyond the scope of this paper, the development of equal opportunity policies in the European Union will be sketched out in the following. Teresa Rees delineates three categories of strategies²³, and the bulk of the literature follows this taxonomy.²⁴

The first stage constituted those policies that are aimed at guaranteeing the *equal treatment* of women and men in the workplace. In 1975 and 1976, the European Community passed two directives on equal pay and equal treatment of women in the workplace under Art. 119 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Four additional directives followed between 1978 and 1992. These provided the legal grounds for a number of landmark legal challenges, particularly in the member states, but also at the Community level. Since 1992, two additional directives on protection at the workplace have been issued.²⁵

In 1982, the Commission launched its first *Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women* (1982-85), followed by two more (1986-90 and 1991-95). These *positive action* programs provided the framework and material means for programs in the member states (partially funded through EU Structural Funds) to promote women’s opportunities in and beyond the workplace and the labour market, and to improve the implementation of existing legal provisions. On the level of the administration of the European Commission, a “Joint Committee on Equal Opportunities” (COPEC) was set up in 1985, which issued a devastating and influential report on the status of women within the Commission’s civil service in 1986. The report particularly pointed at the prevalence of sexual stereotyping.²⁶ In the following, the Commission implemented two *Action Programmes* (1988-90 and 1992-96) and in 1991 established a central Equal Opportunities Unit within the Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs (DG Empl).

Following the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995, where *gender mainstreaming* was first widely promoted by the EU and a number of Nordic countries, the Commission launched its fourth *Community Action Programme* (1996-2000) and third internal *Action Programme* (1997-2000), which both named the mainstreaming of gender into all areas of policy-making and activity their primary objective. The Commission committed itself to “promote equality between women and men in its activities and policies at all levels”.²⁷ Gender Mainstreaming had already been mentioned in the third *Community Action Programme*, but had neither been elaborated nor implemented before 1995. Furthermore, the Santer-Commission (1995-1999) set up a Group of Commissioners and an internal

²² Sonia Mazey, *Gender Mainstreaming in the EU*.

²³ Teresa Rees, *Mainstreaming Equality in the European Union: Education, Training and Labour Market Policies*. (London: Routledge, 1998) Ch.3.

²⁴ For an alternative but similar conception of the “three-legged equality stool” see Christine Booth and Cinnamon Bennett, “Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union: Towards a New Conception and Practice of Equal Opportunities,” *The European Journal of Women’s Studies* 9 (2002) 430-446.

²⁵ Sonia Mazey, *Gender Mainstreaming in the EU*, 21-6.

²⁶ Stevens, *Brussels Bureaucrats?* 112.

²⁷ European Commission, *Incorporating Equal Opportunities for Women and Men into All Community Policies and Activities* (Brussels: COM(1996) 67 final of 21.02.1996).

“inter-service group” on equal opportunities. Subsequently, specific action plans for each of the Directorate Generals (DGs) have been elaborated, including the appointment of ‘gender mainstreaming officials’. Gender mainstreaming has also been implemented into the wider reform plans of the Commission. The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), finally, firmly entrenched in the basic legal framework of the European Union the commitment to balanced representation of women and men through equal treatment, positive action and gender mainstreaming (Art. 2, 13, 3; see Appendix A). A *Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-05)* has now replaced the earlier *Community Action Programmes*. With a specific priority each year, the program will focus on the problematic of “women in decision-making” in 2003. The Commission has also clarified on numerous occasions that gender mainstreaming, as part of a “dual approach”, is a supplement to, not a replacement of existing strategies.²⁸

The Commission has just entered yet another stage of dealing with equal opportunities in policy-making – with uncertain consequences for the practice of gender mainstreaming and necessary changes in the analysis thereof. While maintaining the “dual approach”, starting with a number pilot projects in 2002, gender impact assessment will be fully integrated into a comprehensive impact assessment that encompasses “social, economic, and environmental sustainability” by 2003.²⁹ For a tabular overview of this development, see Appendix B.

2.2 The European Civil Service

A number of models have been employed to characterize the EU bureaucracy.³⁰ Liesbet Hooghe explains that the Commission’s bureaucracy, like most national ones, carries important functions, as it is not only engaged in carrying out orders, but is also involved in the drafting of legislative proposals and making sub-legislative decisions.³¹ For purposes of this study, the administration of the European Commission can, in most aspects, be regarded as similar to many national bureaucracies. At the political level a college of now twenty commissioners head the different Directorate Generals (DGs) and Services. The administrative positions are differentiated into levels A, B, C, and D, as well as the Language Service LA, which is somewhat distinct. With 16,756 employees of which 33.7% are in A level (management) positions, the Commission is of moderate size. This is not a reflection of its limited relevance in the context of European governance, though, but rather the outcome of a particular distribution of labour: Policies directed by the Commission are almost exclusively carried out on the ground by the national or sub-national administrations. The management level (A1-A8) includes a large number of officials in middle management (A4 and A5 1,294 and 1197 respectively) and sharply diminishing numbers above (A3 534, A2 169, A1 58).³²

The EU civil service is mainly made up of permanent officials, temporary staff (mainly research and cabinet members) and detached (seconded) national experts. The last category accounts for approximately 15% of A level positions, but is not considered statutory staff, and paid by the

²⁸ European Commission, *Interim Report on the Implementation of the Medium-Term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (1996-2000)* (Brussels: COM(98) 770 final) 21.

²⁹ European Commission, *Annual Report on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union 2002* (Brussels: COM(2003) 98 final) 8.

³⁰ e.g. Edward Page, *People Who Run Europe*. (Oxford University Press, 1997) and Liesbet Hooghe, “Supranational Activists or Intergovernmental Agents? Explaining Political Orientations of Senior Commission Officials to European Integration” *Comparative Political Studies* 32 (1999) 435-63.

³¹ Liesbet Hooghe, *The Commission and the Integration of Europe*. (Cambridge University Press, 2001) 6.

³² January 2002, European Commission, Numbers of Personnel in the European Commission. Made available to the author by the European Commission, Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs, Equal Opportunities Unit (April 2002).

original employer, mostly national administrations.³³ The Commission has long committed itself and recently further affirmed that recruitment and promotion should be based on merit only. A geographical balance is only seriously considered at the top levels A1-3.³⁴ Closely connected to the issue of regional balance is the issue of *parachutage*. Particularly at the higher levels, some officials are recruited from outside, not through the ranks of the administration. While Page had found numbers up to 82% among A1 officials (66% for A2) in the early nineties,³⁵ Hooghe in the second half of the nineties found that this number had declined to very modest levels. While 43% of A1 and A2 officials were not recruited through the ranks, most of these had either previously occupied temporary staff positions or were parachuted into the Commission because of the EU enlargement. Only 19.7% are “original parachutists”.³⁶ Page agrees that “[t]he degree to which European officials from any one member state are parachuted into the EU civil service to a large extent depends upon the date at which the country joined the EU.”³⁷ In any case, parachutists have to go through an elaborate review process, similar to the one used for career bureaucrats, which involves not only the target Directorate General but also DG Administration.³⁸ A further commitment to meritocracy following the recent scandals in the Santer Commission (1999) and the subsequently increased scrutiny and efforts to reform the Commission, are likely to further strengthen these review processes.³⁹ Since September 1999, only 6 (out of 31) appointments to A1 posts were made of external candidates. Of those 31, 19 were promotions.⁴⁰

The European Union’s *Staff Regulations* govern the statutory promotion process. Within A-grade positions, each level (A8-A1) includes six to eight incremental steps that are taken by civil servants based on seniority and merit.⁴¹ For career civil servants,

the average period for promotion from A7 to A4 is 15 to 20 years. Whilst A4 is the ceiling for a normal career in category A, there are opportunities to be further promoted, [...] about one in four of the staff who reach A4 can expect promotion to A3, and 90 per cent of A3 appointments are internal.⁴²

The advancement of career civil servants beyond A3 takes the shape of internal recruitment. Here the college of commissioners is now always involved in the decision-making process. Hooghe found that 57% of the senior officials she interviewed had been recruited through the ranks. The rest was parachuted into these positions (partially because of EU enlargement) or entered from a Commission cabinet.⁴³ The Commission’s recruitment process now also includes equality provisions, gender balanced selection boards and annual targets to facilitate the increase of the number of women in A-level positions.

³³ Stevens, *Brussels Bureaucrats?* Ch.1.

³⁴ Chris Shore, *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration*. (London: Routledge, 2000)189.

³⁵ Page, *People Who Run Europe*.

³⁶ Hooghe, *The Commission and the Integration of Europe*, 60, Table 2.8.

³⁷ Page, *People Who Run Europe*, 82.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁹ The new *senior staff policy* names “merit” as the “primary factor” for recruitment, while emphasising the Commission’s commitment for “a balance of nationalities” and “a better balance of qualified women and men”. European Commission, *European Commission Announces Next Steps in Implementing New Senior Staff Policy* (Brussels: IP/02/124 of 23.01.2002). As part of the next wave of EU enlargement, the Commission will start hiring 10 A1 level, 42 A2 level and 189 middle management officials from the new member states beginning in 2003. European Commission, “Recruiting Commission Officials From the New Member States” *Enlargement: Weekly Newsletter* (February 25, 2003). Indicative of a relaxed attention to equal opportunities or not, the announcement does not contain a commitment to gender-balanced recruitment in this waive.

⁴⁰ European Commission, *European Commission Announces Next Steps in Implementing New Senior Staff Policy*.

⁴¹ Stevens, *Brussels Bureaucrats?* 97.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴³ Hooghe, *The Commission and the Integration of Europe*.

Still, as will be discussed more in detail below (Part3), women, while making up 48.4% of the Commission's staff, are very much under-represented at management levels (21.8%). In comparison with many other hierarchical organizations, the Commission is not an exception: the higher the position, the fewer women are present. At the very top, only 4 out of 54 Director Generals or their Deputies are women (6.9%).⁴⁴

2.3 Gender Mainstreaming and Organizational Culture

Before turning to a more detailed assessment of the empirical evidence, I will elaborate further on the conceptual link between gender mainstreaming and the representation of women in highest positions of decision-making. The literature now widely accepts a set of prerequisite that need to be in place for gender mainstreaming to have a real effect. Paramount seems the issue of *political will* of a number of key political decision makers within the organization.⁴⁵ Anne Havnør shows how particularly the 1995 enlargement brought in commissioners from Sweden and Finland who were highly committed to gender equality.⁴⁶ The strengthening of the European Parliament in the Maastricht Treaty and the entrenchment of gender mainstreaming in Art. 3 II of the Treaty of Amsterdam further contributed to the focussing of political will. Pollack and Hafner-Burton have convincingly used social movement theory to explain the adoption of gender mainstreaming in terms of political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and strategic issue framing.⁴⁷ What emerges from these coinciding factors is the following question: Is it simply political will that is decisive, or is there an element genuine to the set of strategies associated with gender mainstreaming that will enable political will to translate widely into an increase in the number of women in highest positions of decision-making? Here the argument will be made for the latter.

There needs to be sufficient *expertise* and *bureaucratic understanding* of the problematic to actually implement the strategies successfully. The Commission has taken steps to train senior policy makers and has issued a "Guide to Gender Impact Assessment"⁴⁸. Still, Mazey finds that "there is wide-spread ignorance of and misunderstanding about the concept of gender mainstreaming among policy-makers within the EU and the member states".⁴⁹ What exactly is meant by gender mainstreaming is also a contested matter. In the narrow sense of the term, the "concept of 'gender mainstreaming' is deceptively simple. In short, it implies a commitment to incorporate gender into all areas of public policy, rather than considering women's issues as a discrete policy problem".⁵⁰ For such an endeavour to be successful, however, more conditions have to be met. Beveridge et al. place particular emphasis on the need for participation and inclusion of women in the decision-making process and on adequate information to be gathered; they favour a 'participatory-democratic' instead of a 'expert-bureaucratic' form of implementation in order to "make mainstreaming everyone's business".⁵¹ Ana-Paula Laissy,

⁴⁴ European Commission, Numbers of Personnel in the European Commission.

⁴⁵ Verloo in her discussion contrasts the lacking political will in earlier attempts to integrate gender into policy-making to more recent attempts Mieke Verloo, "Another Velvet Revolution?"

⁴⁶ Anne Havnør, *Partnership, Political Will and Agency – Gender Mainstreaming at the EC Level and in the Central Administration of Norway*. (Paper presented at the "Mainstreaming Gender in European Union Public Policy" workshop, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 14-15 October 2000. Available at: <http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/eucenter/Conferences/Gender/havnoer.htm>).

⁴⁷ Mark A. Pollack and Emilie Hafner-Burton, "Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union" *Journal of European Public Policy* 7 (2000) 432-56.

⁴⁸ European Commission, *A Guide to Gender Impact Assessment* (Brussels: DG Employment and Social Affairs, 1997).

⁴⁹ Sonia Mazey, *Gender Mainstreaming in the EU*, 21-6, 49.

⁵⁰ Sonia Mazey, "Introduction: Integrating Gender – Intellectual and 'Real World' mainstreaming," 341.

⁵¹ Fiona Beveridge, Sue Nott and Kylie Stephen, "Mainstreaming and the Engendering of Policy-Making: A Means to an End?" *Journal of European Public Policy* 7 (2000) 385-405, 390-1.

Head of Unit for equal opportunities at the DG Personnel and Administration, finally, adds to the list of necessary conditions a process of decentralization and delegation as well as measures to make work and family responsibilities compatible.⁵²

As the 1985 COPEC report showed very persuasively, equal treatment and the first affirmative action attempts had both aspired to help women to adjust to a male norm of the working environment. Furthermore, it had pointed at the prevalence of sexual stereotyping and the existence of male networks necessary to get promoted inside the Commission. Stevens similarly describes the differential treatment of women and men in the promotion process.⁵³ By no means is this phenomenon confined to the European Commission. Feminist scholars of organizations and state bureaucracies in particular have long emphasised how hierarchical organizations are fundamentally gendered in that they imply a male worker behind the mask of neutral terminology.⁵⁴ This critique of 'neutral' organizations is mirrored in feminist critiques of the 'gender-neutral' liberal state and citizenship.⁵⁵ Women entering these organizations have to adapt to a 'male' culture that is based on "a tough-minded approach to problems; analytic abilities to abstract and plan; a capacity to set aside personal, emotional considerations in the interest of task accomplishment."⁵⁶ The necessity of adapting to this culture has as a result that only particular women (and men!) have a chance of advancing in hierarchical organizations. Those who are not willing to adapt their behaviour or simply have family responsibilities that do not allow them to work long irregular hours are thereby excluded from positions of decision-making not by means of formal discrimination, but because the organizational environment shapes the (gendered) view of themselves and influences career choices.⁵⁷

These cultural constraints are continually constructed and reproduced as "webs of meaning [...] through the everyday practices of actors."⁵⁸ "Femocrats", as Hester Eisenstein has termed women who enter the state bureaucratic machinery in order to transform it from a feminist perspective, are "constrained to work within the parameters of a masculinist administrative culture, whilst simultaneously contesting the masculinist character of the state."⁵⁹ They "must behave like men, but cannot *be* men."⁶⁰ As a result, the few women who advance into positions of decision-making regularly find themselves unable to change these organizational parameters or induce progressive politics of change. The male bias goes beyond the regulation of working time, which can be tackled by formal rules (and some of these rules have recently been extended in the Commission to encompass management levels as well). It is firmly situated in the constructed "symbols and images" and the "interaction between women and men, women and women, men and men."⁶¹ It is in these informal rules of an organization that the glass ceiling is entrenched. With regard to the senior positions, the importance of informal rules becomes clearer when one examines the relationships of men and women in organizations. Attention to informal networks has long been prominent among scholars of

⁵² Ana Paula Laissy, "Die Kommission." *AG Innsbruck* (Issue 1/99, pp. 39-40; Report on the EU Conference "Frauenförderung im öffentlichen Dienst der Mitgliedstaaten und Institutionen der Europäischen Union").

⁵³ Stevens, *Brussels Bureaucrats?*

⁵⁴ Joan Acker, "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations." *Gender and Society* 4 (1990) 139-58; Rosabeth Kanter, "Men and Women of the Corporation" (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

⁵⁵ e.g. Anne Phillips, *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

⁵⁶ Kanter [1977] quoted in Acker, "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies," 143.

⁵⁷ Sonia Lind and Kate Ward, "Distorted Views Through the Glass Ceiling: The Construction of Women's Understandings of Promotion and Senior Management Positions" *Gender, Work and Organization* 8 (2001) 19-36.

⁵⁸ Karen Ramsay and Martin Parker, "Gender, Bureaucracy and Organizational Culture" *The Sociological Review Monograph* (Oxford: Blackwell: Vol. 39 (1992), "Gender and Bureaucracy" 253-76), 258.

⁵⁹ Anne Witz and Mike Savage, "The Gender of Organizations" In *The Sociological Review Monograph* (Oxford: Blackwell, Vol. 39 (1992), "Gender and Bureaucracy" 3-62), 40.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶¹ Acker, "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies," 146-7.

the internal dynamics of the European Commission. Stevens points at the importance of networking, personal mentors, and the 'right connections' as necessary conditions for advancing into higher positions of decision-making. Under these circumstances a 1988 survey of commission staff found that "producing results and hard work" fared least important among the factors leading to promotion.⁶² Again, these result are not unlike those found in other bureaucracies. Particularly small groups based on friendship, the "old boys' networks", tend to be particularly resilient.⁶³

Beyond basing organizational behaviour on cultural norms, the relevance of informal rules can also be demonstrated from a second perspective by looking at the actors' preferences within the institution. This perspective is also able to shed some light on the mechanisms in place that cause resilience of organizational patterns – something that the broad approaches of organizational culture rarely are able to demonstrate satisfactorily. Based on 137 interviews with senior (A1 and A2 level) Commission officials and over a hundred surveys, Hooghe compares the relative strength of socialization and utility-maximization factors in determining officials' attitudes and likely behaviour. She concludes that for concrete and specific issues, "utility maximization predominates. [...] When preferences bear directly on issues of professional survival or success, internalized beliefs give way to utility concerns."⁶⁴ These utility calculations are not made in a vacuum, however. Rather, the *institutional matrix*, consisting of the set formal rules and informal constraints as well as enforcement mechanisms, determines the incentive structure by which actors maximize utility.⁶⁵ The prevalence of informal rules creates an *increasing returns characteristic* that prevents a gender democratic evolution of the organization's rules and processes. The informal dynamics create situations where it may actually be detrimental for a man to sponsor a woman's promotion: "... if a man puts a woman forward, people say he must be sleeping with her, so sponsoring a woman is seen as a bigger risk for a man."⁶⁶ The active promotion of women, has for a long time only been advantageous for a few (women) civil servants in the 'equal opportunities niche'.

Gender mainstreaming is ultimately aimed at transforming both formal rules and informal constraints within an organization. It has, at least in the long run, the potential of tackling informal barriers within an organisation that are basically untouched by either equal treatment or special treatment policies (see Table 1). A changed organizational culture can then be expected to transform substantive policy-making. Organizational cultures shape the way data are interpreted, problems are identified, solutions are attached to problems, and in general has an important impact on organizational learning.⁶⁷ Organizations, as "systems of interrelated roles" provide the locus for actors 'bounded rationality'.⁶⁸

⁶² Stevens, *Brussels Bureaucrats?* 86; 102-3; 114.

⁶³ Gwen Moore, "Gender and Informal Networks in State Government" *Social Science Quarterly* 73 (1992) 46-61.

⁶⁴ Hooghe, *The Commission and the Integration of Europe*, 213.

⁶⁵ Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁶⁶ quoted in Stevens, *Brussels Bureaucrats?* 114.

⁶⁷ Julianne Mahler, "Influences of Organizational Culture on Learning in Public Agencies" *Journal Of Public Administration Research and Theory* 7 (1997) 519-40.

⁶⁸ Herbert Simon, "Bounded Rationality and Organizational Learning" *Organization Science* 2 (1991) 125-34.

Table 1: Forms of Organizational Change

Organizational rules affected	Causes of Organizational Change	
	Intentional (formal) measures	Unintentional or societal change
Formal rules (e.g. recruitment procedures)	① Equal Treatment ② Positive Action ③ Gender Mainstreaming (I) (e.g. working time regulations)	Symbolic effects that transform the context in which formal rules are interpreted. <i>Not expected to produce 'sudden' changes</i>
Informal rules (i.e. organizational culture)	③ Gender Mainstreaming (II) (e.g. awareness, training, etc.)	Gradually increased awareness <i>Not expected to produce 'sudden' changes</i>

Gender mainstreaming, by taking into account the differential situation of women and men, is directly geared toward transforming a male dominated organizational culture.⁶⁹ Through a number of 'soft' practices, the strategy offers the possibility of transforming informal practices and mentalities, such as sexual stereotyping. Realizing the limited prospects of a centralized top-down approach, gender mainstreaming is monitored and reviewed centrally, but implemented within the individual DGs. Already in 1995, the Equal Opportunities Unit was involved in programs in 22 of the 30 DGs.⁷⁰ In addition to its Inter-Service Group on equal opportunities in general, a second one, focussed exclusively on gender mainstreaming, was also established in 1996. It serves to bring a gender perspective into the different DGs and to coordinate the decentralized activities.⁷¹

An additional effect of this devolution effort is that it works against agency stereotyping. It is no longer an outside entity that imposes rules upon a disinterested DG. Rather, the DG itself has to implement gender considerations into all of its activities and report a rationale for the decisions taken. The centrally located Equal Opportunities Unit provides training in terms of gender impact assessment and, crucially, training workshops for decision-makers that are aimed at sensitizing them for issues of gender equality (awareness raising). Ideally, as decision-makers on all levels, in all areas are forced to take gender into consideration when preparing external policies, they are more likely to, at least in the long run, engage in gender democratic formal and informal practices. Havnør, in her account of the Norwegian case, where gender mainstreaming had been established for some years prior to the EU, reports that the “mainstreaming policy has little by little contributed to redirecting our focus, to raising questions pertaining to men’s adaptation and priorities; an engendering of the

⁶⁹ The Commission recognizes in its interim report on the 4th Community Action Programme that gender mainstreaming must include “the mobilization of all policies and actors, including those not familiar with equality issues” as well as “a cultural change in mentality and behaviour” European Commission, *Interim Report on the Implementation of the Medium-Term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (1996-2000)* (Brussels: COM(1998) 770 final). It aims to achieve this “gender-sensitive work culture” by including considerations of equal opportunities at all stages (recruitment, promotion, training) and providing additional “training for all personnel in mainstreaming equal opportunities policies” European Commission, *Towards A Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005)*. (Brussels: COM(2000) 335 final of 07.06.2000), 18.

⁷⁰ Stevens, *Brussels Bureaucrats?* 111.

⁷¹ Mazey, *Gender Mainstreaming in the EU* 38.

male.”⁷² The extent to which these strategies have actually been successful at becoming part of every day procedures across all DGs will be examined more in detail below (Part 3.2).

Gender mainstreaming “is based upon the recognition of gender differences between men and women in terms of their socio-economic status and family responsibilities.”⁷³ And instead of helping women to adjust to a male norm, it aims at bringing the consideration of these differences into all activities of an organization. At the same time, gender mainstreaming does not necessarily assume any gender differences to be naturally given or fixed over time. The concept is open to take femininity and masculinity as socially constructed and variable categories and allows for aspects of intersectionality – the incorporation of difference based on personal histories as well as the interaction of (men’s and women’s) gender with aspects of social class, race, age, etc..

3 Measuring Success

3.1 The Number of Women in Decision-Making Positions Over Time⁷⁴

From the discussion above, it is now possible to specify hypotheses about the impact of equality policies with regard to the European Commission. Commission officials at the two highest levels A1 and A2 together make up 4.1% of all A grade civil servants and are therefore considered to be in ‘highest positions of decision-making’.⁷⁵ The next level, A3, makes up 10% of the total A grade employment.⁷⁶

The question remains, how *internal* change in the recruitment and promotion processes of the European Commission are to be distinguished from more macro-institutional or societal change, which is necessarily *external*. Far from being able to offer a sophisticated device, it will be assumed here that sudden, significant, and sustained changes in the direction of the development of the representation of women are very unlikely due to societal changes, which are typically gradual.⁷⁷ Rather, those can be attributed to internal, organizational changes, as already suggested in Table 1 above.

To recollect from Part 2.1 above, the equal opportunity measures at the European level, can be differentiated into three distinct stages: equal treatment policies, starting in 1975; positive action policies since 1982; and finally mainstreaming policies since 1996. Over most of the examined time period, the number of women in A1 and A2 positions, with some fluctuation, remains very low between 0% and 2.5% (1977, 1994). The exception is 1984, when two women (out of 45) held A1 positions. Earlier data are unfortunately not available at this point, which makes a comparison with the period before equal treatment policies were started impossible. The introduction of positive action programmes in 1982 coincides with an increase in the overall number of women in A-level positions from 6.1% to 9.3% in 1984. This period, however precedes the time when the most important programs were implemented internally following the Joint Committee’s report in 1985. Over the eight year period between 1984 and 1992, the total number of women increased by only 2% – despite the fact that the total number of A-level positions actually doubled in that period. The affirmative action programs, in combination with continuing and expanded equal treatment policies, have therefore had

⁷² Havnør, *Partnership, Political Will and Agency*.

⁷³ Mazey, *Gender Mainstreaming in the EU* 7.

⁷⁴ For sources to the data presented here, see Appendix C.

⁷⁵ Hooghe, *The European Commission and the Integration of Europe* and Stevens, *Brussels Bureaucrats?* similarly distinguish these “senior management” positions from the other A grade levels.

⁷⁶ March 2000, European Database – Women in Decision-Making, *Employees by Sex and Grade within the Administration of the European Commission*. (Berlin: FrauenComputerZentrumBerlin. Available at: <http://www.db-decision.de>).

⁷⁷ e.g. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*.

only limited impact on management level positions in the European Commission. As noted in the introduction, these results are consistent with the findings of other studies in local governments⁷⁸ and European universities.⁷⁹

While women in A3-level positions were still almost absent in 1984, their numbers had risen to 7% by 1994. A *glass ceiling* seems to have developed between A2 and A3 levels. After 1995, however, the number of women in A2 positions rose significantly from 2.6% to 8.8% in 1997 and 13.2% in 2002. This is exactly the period when gender mainstreaming was implemented at the EU level. The number of women in A1 positions rose also, albeit less dramatically and with a late start. It doubled between 1994 and 1999 and again increased by 80% between 1999 and 2001. Between January 2001 and January 2002, it again decreased by 7% as, in terms of net change, four additional male Director Generals or Deputy Director Generals, but no woman were appointed. Although the available data are quite patchy, it seems that the glass ceiling between levels A3 and A2 has been cracked. Yet in its place is now a significant difference between the proportion of women in A1 and A2 level positions (see Appendix C).

The number of women Directors (A2) is continually on the rise since 1995 and has by January 2002 actually surpassed that of level A3 and equalled the proportion at level A4. While women at lower management levels A5-A8 are also continually on the rise and backed by increased recruitment (36.3% for all A level positions in 2001), the proportion of women in middle management (A3 and A4) has almost stalled since 1999. Whether this phenomenon constitutes a prolonged 'evening off' of the curve or is simply due to normal volatility cannot be determined from these data. In 2002, 56 of 189 appointments (or 29%) in middle management were women. It is clear from examining the overall development of the proportion of women in the administration of the Commission, that changes have overall been slow and for much of the time rather marginal. During the 15 year period between 1977 and 1992, the proportion at all A-levels rose by only 4.4%. Since the mid 1990s, however, changes have been more substantial (10.5% since 1992 and 7.8 since 1995).

3.2 Variation *within* the Commission

In the European Commission, gender mainstreaming as a set of policy, recruitment and training measures is employed in the individual DGs but monitored and supported centrally through the Equal Opportunities Unit and the two Inter-Service Groups. In this section, I will present first cursory evidence of how gender mainstreaming has fared in the different DGs of the Commission. Similar to national departments, Directorates General are important "units of identification" within the Commission and differ sharply in both worldview and occupational structure of their staff.⁸⁰ Hooghe also emphasizes the variation in attitudes across DGs.⁸¹

Ideally, the *change* in numbers of women in the different DGs between 1995 and today could serve as a good indicator to measure success when correlated with the specific measures taken, particularly efforts such as awareness raising and training for senior management officials. Those DGs that have widely implemented gender mainstreaming policies should also experience a significant increase in the proportion of women, if the logic proposed here works. Unfortunately, DG specific

⁷⁸ Gidengil and Vengroff, "Representative Bureaucracy, Tokenism and the Glass Ceiling."

⁷⁹ Annette Zimmer et al., *Career Prospects of Women in the European Union*. (University of Münster: Report submitted to the European Commission, SOE2-CT98-2050, 2000).

⁸⁰ Maryon McDonald, "Identities in the European Commission" In Neill Nugent (ed.), *At the Heart of the Union: Studies of the European Commission* (2nd ed., Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000) 49-72.

⁸¹ Hooghe, *The Commission and the Integration of Europe*. Michelle Cini considers the DG "as the most appropriate level of analysis for research into the Commission's cultural components." Michelle Cini, "Administrative Culture in the European Commission: The Cases of Competition and Environment" In Neill Nugent (ed.), *At the Heart of the Union: Studies of the European Commission* (2nd ed., Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000) 73-90.

data are here only available for the years 1999 through 2001 – a short period of time long after the start of the program. Moreover, data disaggregated by different levels of management positions (A1-A8) are not available either. Nonetheless, I will use these data for a very preliminary quantitative examination before moving on to a qualitative comparison of the implementation of gender mainstreaming in two Directorates General.

Ana-Paula Laissy, head of the Commission's Equal Opportunities Unit has found that with the 3rd Action Programme (1997-2000) a 'change in outlook' occurred. Decision-makers in the DGs are now taking their responsibilities seriously, whereas only a few years prior equal opportunities had often, secretly and openly, been ridiculed.⁸² Under the new *Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005)*, the proposed programs carried out by each DG are centrally recorded and published as "Work Programmes".⁸³ Furthermore, recruitment and promotion targets have been set for senior officials.⁸⁴ Pollack and Hafner-Burton in their study of five issue areas within the Commission, on the other hand, find "considerable variation in the implementation of gender mainstreaming" across areas.⁸⁵ They highlight that gender mainstreaming in the EU has not caused radical changes in the way the organization operates, but that it has rather been integrated into the existing organizational structure. While this has been criticized for potentially giving up the essence of a gender democratic approach, it has provided for an avenue to persuade decision-makers unfamiliar with the concept to embrace gender mainstreaming. Particularly the ongoing attempts to reform the Commission have given equal opportunities credibility on meritocratic and efficiency grounds. Gender mainstreaming has been sold to the different DGs according to their prevalent dominant policy frame either as a matter of social justice or administrative efficiency.⁸⁶

3.2.1 Preliminary Quantitative Assessment

From the discussion of the literature in Part 2 and the more specific discussion of the European Commission, two points become apparent. First, because of the organizational constraints that 'expect' a certain kind of man or woman for senior posts, preferences and behaviour of female and male civil servants should not differ significantly. Rather, it is secondly the particular organizational environment that more or less facilitates the advancement of women into positions of decision-making. By comparing similar units (DG) within one organization (the European Commission), the effect of formal rules on the equal opportunities are automatically held constant. The variation measured therefore pertains to differing informal constraints, differing preferences and habits, short organizational culture. In the end, these test will not be able to deliver a conclusive answer to the question of whether gender mainstreaming drives an increasing gender balance in decision-making. What can be established is the importance of organizational environment for the passive representation of women.

Little research has been done on the European Commission's civil services that involves quantifiable variables and indicators. None has been performed with specific regard to gender. My analysis here is based on a dataset provided by Liesbet Hooghe. It combines information from 105 interviews and surveys conducted by Liesbet Hooghe with senior civil servants (94 of which are A1 or

⁸² Laissy, "Die Kommission" 39-40.

⁸³ European Commission, *Framework Strategy on Gender Equality: Work Programme for 2001* (Brussels: COM(2001) 119 final); European Commission, *Framework Strategy on Gender Equality: Work Programme for 2002* (Brussels: COM(2001) 773 final).

⁸⁴ European Commission, *Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union: Annual Report 1997* (Brussels: COM(1999) 106 final), 87.

⁸⁵ Pollack and Hafner-Burton, "Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union" 439. This finding is also supported by an internal evaluation of the implementation of gender impact assessments across DGs. European Commission, *Gender Scoreboard 2001* (Brussels: DG Employment and Social Affairs, 2002).

⁸⁶ Pollack and Hafner-Burton, "Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union" 441.

A2-level officials) between Summer 1995 and Spring 1997. Although it was not designed to answer questions of gender, the standard survey and highly structured interview material as well as the large number of cases (there are only approximately 220 such positions) provides for high reliability of the results. Beside standard personal characteristics and their current position, it specifies information about their professional background, their partisanship and political standing, the use of their time in general and to meet different people in and outside Brussels, and their opinion on a variety of questions concerning European integration and the Commission's role in it. It is also roughly representative of the larger population of senior civil servants at the Commission.⁸⁷ I combine this dataset with information on the proportion of women by DG and the change therein between 1999 and 2001, which was provided by the European Commission. Based on the discussion above (Part 2), I conduct four clusters of tests.⁸⁸

Consistent with the explanation offered here, the analysis shows that women in senior positions of the Commission are not significantly different in their career path, their opinions on European Integration, or the way they allocate their work time. Despite recent efforts to transform the organization in order to make it more adaptable to individual decision makers' needs under the umbrella of gender mainstreaming, only those women and men who meet the expectations set by the dominant rules and procedures can be expected to move into top positions.

Secondly, those DGs that are heavily engaged in administrating, implementing and adjudicating EU policies and programs have the lowest proportion of women in management positions – 3.14% below the average. On the other hand, DGs concerned with policy areas that use most frequently benchmarking, soft law, peer group pressure, technical reporting, and other soft policy instruments score on average 5.72% higher. Clearly, it is not the process of administration itself that deters women or the use of soft policy tools that facilitates their career prospects. Rather, these kinds of organizational units are very different in a number of respects. One such factor is the reputation, as reported by officials, that comes with a certain kind of work. “Soft policy-DG,” a factor conceptualized by Hooghe, is strongly correlated with a lower reputation ($r = -.59$; significant at .01). DGs with a lower proportion of women in management also seem to more closed off from the other units and groups and institutions outside the Commission, as the examination of regular contacts with other DGs, and institutions and groups outside the institution has shown.

All too quick inferences from the results of a third cluster of tests, the change in the proportion of women in management between 1999 and 2001, should be cautioned. The time span is simply too short to warrant generalizations. Still, it should be noted that some of the results speak directly against the findings in Cluster II. “Reputation,” which was highly salient in the second cluster is not significantly related to the change in the proportion of women. Two explanations are possible for this contradiction. First, the correlations found across some twenty DGs in Cluster II were, despite their statistical significance, merely coincidental or based on a correlation with different, unexamined factors. A second explanation seems more plausible: Because of the strong progress

⁸⁷ Seven of the 105 respondents are women (6.7%, 6.4% of those who are A1 or A2 officials). Lacking a comparable official number for the period of 1995 to 1997, I calculate the average of the closest dates for which data is available ('1994' + '1999'/2 = 6.1%). The sample in the dataset is therefore roughly representative of the overall population of senior Commission officials. For a more detailed analysis concerning the representativeness of other characteristics beside gender see Hooghe, *The Commission and the Integration of Europe* (Ch.2). The national background of the actors is one aspect that is often discussed by scholars of the European Commission. Here it will be left out as a possible explanation since a deliberate balance is generally kept among officials at levels A3 through A1. Furthermore, Hooghe found that the alleged domination by certain nations of some DGs is more of a myth and usually out of date.

⁸⁸ Those include t-tests and chi-square tests for the first cluster as well as ANOVA, bivariate and multivariate OLS regression analyses for the other clusters. For sake of brevity and readability, I have decided to leave out all but the most important and crucial statistical details from the following discussion. Detailed results are, of course, available upon request.

made by DGs with a stronger record in the promotion of women between 1995 and 1999 (when gender mainstreaming was first widely introduced), traditionally more reluctant DGs were pressured to catch up with regard to gender equality. This account is also backed by the finding that the proportion of women in management in 1999 is actually negatively correlated with the change in said proportion after 1999 ($r = -.57$; significant at .01).

Finally and most closely related to the question addressed in this paper, I examine the relationship that the commitment to and implementation of gender mainstreaming with the absolute representation of women at management levels and the change in this proportion. As indicators for commitment I take whether a department indicated ongoing or planned gender mainstreaming strategies in the annual Work Programme on Gender Equality. The scores for 2001 and 2002 are positively correlated ($r = .59$, significant at .01). As an indicator for actual implementation I use the 2001 *Gender Scoreboard*, which reports full, partly, or no compliance with three gender mainstreaming priorities and is published by the Employment and Social Affairs DG. Unfortunately only this .⁸⁹ The tests for statistical correlation between commitment and implementation variables on the one side and current proportion of women and change therein since 1999 on the other side yield no statistically significant results, and can therefore not be used in the empirical analysis. Two of the most significant obstacles to obtaining significant results are clearly the low number of cases and the large number of missing cases.⁹⁰ Reports from additional years will hopefully help to consolidate the indicators and subsequently aid in obtaining significant results.

Again, it is difficult to specify a straightforward relationship or to conclusively demonstrate causality. Given that few DGs have actually achieved the proposed critical threshold of 30% representation, and given that women managers do not differ decisively from their male counterparts, there is at least some indication that the commitment to gender mainstreaming may actually be transforming the recruitment and promotion practices, not the other way around.

3.2.2 Gender Mainstreaming in Directorates General Research and Competition

The development in two DGs, Research and Competition, will be introduced here to illustrate and contextualize the processes inside DGs. In terms of their dominant organizational frame, both have traditionally not been favourable grounds to issues of gender equality. They are two cases where gender mainstreaming would, in terms of traditional policy styles and administrative culture not be expected to gain much ground. Still, the different changes that have taken place in both DGs, permit a comparison that can shed some light on the empirical link between gender mainstreaming and the representation of women in senior positions. Neither has women A1 officials acting as either Director-General or Deputy Director-General.⁹¹ DG Research has traditionally emphasised technical

⁸⁹ European Commission, *Framework Strategy: Work Programme for 2001*; European Commission, *Framework Strategy: Work Programme for 2002*; European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Paper: Work Programme for 2001 of Each Commission Service for the Implementation of the Framework Strategy on Gender Equality* (Brussels: 02.03.2001); European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Paper: Work Programme for 2002 for the Implementation of the Framework Strategy on Gender Equality* (Brussels: SEC(2001)1992); European Commission, *Gender Scoreboard 2001*.

⁹⁰ The dataset contains 39 cases (DGs and other Commission services). Twelve of these had not yet replied to DG Employment to be included in the Gender Scoreboard; European Commission, *Gender Scoreboard 2001* 8fn7. Similar missing data in the Work Programmes yielded tests for correlation with mostly only 15 or 20 included cases. Visual examination with scatter plots using both individual measures and index scores of the independent variables also revealed few patterns.

⁹¹ According to the organigrams published on the DGs websites, dated December 12, 2002 (Competition http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/index_en.html) and May 1, 2003 (Research http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/index_en.html) (accessed April 24, 2003).

efficiency and excellence, while DG Competition operates under a decisively neo-liberal frame.⁹² The latter “has taken a principled stance against the integration of gender into its decision-making process” and “is mentioned frequently by Commission officials as the most resistant of the Commission services to the gender-mainstreaming mandate.”⁹³ The DG has the largest autonomy within the Commission and from the Council of Ministers and carries considerable policy-making powers and flexibility to set priorities.⁹⁴ This longstanding autonomy has allowed it to refuse the ‘soft policy’ recommendations made by the Equal Opportunities Unit and has subsequently not reported any mainstreaming or positive action consideration for both 2001 and 2002.⁹⁵ It only complied to demands for implementing gender mainstreaming through disaggregating by gender statistics regarding its own personnel policy.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, DG Competition exhibits a slightly higher than average proportion of women at A-levels (22.9%; average across the Commission: 21.8%). More importantly, this number has increased by 2.7% between 1999 and 2001, again slightly higher than the Commission’s average of 2.4%.

Pollack and Hafner-Burton show how the DG for Research, organized much more openly than DG Competition, changed its outlook decisively over the second half of the 1990s, as Edith Cresson, then Commissioner for Research, directed and groups of women scientists lobbied the DG to adopt a more gender sensitive approach.⁹⁷ Subsequently, the DG has with some success taken steps to increase the proportion of women in its committees and expert groups. In 2001 a 66 page gender impact assessment of the *Fifth Community Framework Programme for European Research Activities (1998-2002)* was published, which identified as a crucial and ongoing project the increased gender sensitivity of the DG’s staff and the tackling of a perceived “male-dominated culture”.⁹⁸ The A-grade staff in DG Research is also vertically and to some extent horizontally segregated along gender lines. Still, considerable progress has been made: whereas DG Research had the lowest proportion of A-grade officials in the early 1990s (7.6%),⁹⁹ that number rose from 10.5% to 15.5% between 1999 and 2001. The latter is a considerably higher increase than the Commission’s average increase of 2.4%, yet the absolute proportion is still lower than the Commission’s average 21.8%.

The results of gender mainstreaming across different DGs have been mixed. DG Research has made considerably more progress by employing gender mainstreaming techniques to its policy-making and personnel management. DG Competition has also made some progress, despite open opposition to equal opportunity measures. Clearly, an unequivocal and immediate relationship between gender mainstreaming and an increase in the number of women does not exist. Moreover, the specific institutional environment of DGs has to be taken into account when assessing the likelihood of policy change. To determine whether the employment of mainstreaming techniques systematically furthers the advancement of women in an organization by transforming its informal and formal rules, more disaggregated and, most importantly, long-term data will have to be studied.

⁹² Pollack and Hafner-Burton, “Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union.”

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 447.

⁹⁴ Cini, “Administrative Culture in the European Commission,” 82-3.

⁹⁵ European Commission, *Framework Strategy: Work Programme for 2001*; European Commission, *Framework Strategy: Work Programme for 2002*.

⁹⁶ European Commission, *Gender Scoreboard 2001*.

⁹⁷ Pollack and Hafner-Burton, “Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union.” 447-50.

⁹⁸ European Commission, *Gender in Research: Gender Impact Assessment of the Specific Programmes of the Fifth Framework Programme* (Brussels: EUR 20022, 2001) 18.

⁹⁹ Pollack and Hafner-Burton, “Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union.” 447-8.

4 Alternative Explanations

A theoretical explanation's value in a complex social system is not only measured by its own predictive power, but particularly by how it fares in comparison to other, alternative explanations. This is especially the case since the purpose of the explanation is not only to make sense of one specific case (here the European Commission), but that it should, if valid, be applicable to other, comparable cases. At the most basic level, in order for inferences to have any meaning, *coincidence* or chance alone as explanations must be ruled out. In the case of the European Commission, the rather consistent increase in the number of women in senior positions over the second half of the 1990s points to a systematic change in the organization, rather than random variation.

The college of Commissioners and the cabinets play a decisive role in the recruitment and promotion procedure of senior civil servants.¹⁰⁰ In their position as the final decision makers, they can be regarded as institutional gatekeepers. Furthermore, the necessary condition of *political will* for successful gender mainstreaming has been mentioned above. While political will does not simply translate itself into organizational change, an alternative explanation may lie in the impact that the Swedish and the Finnish commissioners have had on the institutional recruitment practices in the college of commissioners. Commissioners have a direct influence on the appointments made at A1 and A2 levels, but are only partly involved with appointments made to A3 posts and below. As shown above, the gender gap between A2, A3 and A4 levels is now closed, which suggests (although it by no means proves) that the *direct* influence of commissioners is at least not the lone explanation for the increased number of women in decision-making positions. Furthermore, since there is only one Commissioner from each of these countries, direct influence is constrained to only a few of the Commission's services.

The strong increase of women at A1 and A2 levels may also be due to the *influx of Swedish and Finnish women* into the Commission with the 1995 enlargement. Officials from these two countries make up only 5.4 % of all A-grade officials, however.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, four out of five of these senior civil servants who returned a questionnaire to Liesbet Hooghe between 1995 and 1997 were men. The significant increase particularly in A2-level officials can therefore not be due to the influx of Swedish and Finnish women. On the other hand, Swedish and Finnish civil servants surely brought experience and expertise in gender mainstreaming and general equal opportunity measures with them when they entered the Commission in the mid-1990s. This influx of knowledge may have very well had a significant impact on the development, implementation and success of the new policies. Rather than constituting an alternative explanation, however, this reasoning complements the argument brought forward here, namely that political will and expertise are necessary conditions for the success of gender mainstreaming practices.

The general characteristics of a body of personnel cannot be changed from one day to another. There is necessarily a large *time lag* between the implementation of a new personnel policy and the point in time when all staff have been affected by it upon recruitment or promotion. The top officials that Hooghe interviewed between 1995 and 1997 had on average worked in the Commission for eighteen years (median 21 years) and already spent seven to eight years in a senior position.¹⁰² One alternative explanation for the increase in the proportion of women senior civil servants could therefore be the success of affirmative action and equal treatment policies – only with a ten to twenty year time lag. A time-lag certainly operates within the Commission's personnel as it takes time for new waves of officials to step up on the career ladder. The Commission is sufficient in size, however, to exhibit a relatively constant flow of staff in and out of the organization, so that change is at no point completely stalled. Moreover, since a considerable proportion of officials does not have to go through

¹⁰⁰ Stevens, *Brussels Bureaucrats?* Ch.4.

¹⁰¹ Shore, *Building Europe* 184, Table 1.

¹⁰² Hooghe, *The Commission and the Integration of Europe* 55.

the ranks, new personnel policies should show some effect within a short amount of time. A sudden surge, such as that noted of A2 officials since 1995, is very unlikely due to a particular set of policies implemented ten or fifteen years before.

Another possible explanation for the increased number of women in senior posts concerns the decreased relevance of *parachutage* and patronage in the recruitment procedures of the European Union. If the national governments systematically parachuted fewer women civil servants into the commission than would have advanced through the ranks of the Commission, then a change in the number of parachuted officials (as documented in Part 2.2) should have an impact on the number of women in senior positions. One indicator for this possible phenomenon is the difference between the number of women at the EU and at the national level. To see whether the number of women in senior posts of the European Union's institution are roughly representative of those in the member countries, Page compares it to the numbers present in the permanent representations of the member countries at the EU level and comes to the result that they are quite similar.¹⁰³ While the definition of senior posts varies greatly between the administrative systems of the member states, the similarity in aggregate numbers suggests at most an insignificant influence of *parachutage*. At the same time, a reduction in the amount of *parachutage*, as well as stricter evaluation procedures for those actually parachuted, should result in a greater reach of the Commission's internal recruitment and promotion standards vis-à-vis those of the member states and thereby increase the leverage of gender mainstreaming measures.

The alternative explanations offered so far seem to have no more than very limited influence on the increased number of women in senior positions of the Commission's administration. Of course, it has to be kept in mind that the increase, although significant, has been limited. Women are still very much under-represented in decision-making positions. The convolution of all factors mentioned above could have had the cumulative effect observed. Still, this "all factors are important" kind of account is highly speculative and not backed by a coherent theoretical explanation. The argument brought forward here, which is based on gender mainstreaming and its prerequisites, is clearly more parsimonious and could therefore be better applied to cases of other bureaucracies and organizations.

5 Conclusion

Sonia Mazey notes that "given the long-term nature of gender mainstreaming strategies, any such [empirical] evaluation, especially with respect to policy impact, is almost certainly premature."¹⁰⁴ The discussion here has clearly shown that for a more reliable assessment of gender mainstreaming in the European Commission, two things will be required. Firstly, more detailed and systematically collected data will have to be gathered in order to map in more detail the impact that gender mainstreaming has had in recent years on the experiences of individual civil servants as well as organizational culture and informal procedures. For the dependent variable, the number of women in positions of decision-making, more disaggregated numerical data on the representation of women at different management levels in the DGs would be helpful in assessing the effect that mainstreaming has had. In order to construct independent variables that cover issues of organizational culture, informal networks and the position of women in the organization in general more directly, a broad set of structured interviews and surveys has to be conducted. Results from subsequent analysis could then be used to assess what changes have to be taken to turn the European Commission into a more gender democratic organization. Secondly, since the transformation of an organization's cultural characteristics takes time

¹⁰³ Page, *People Who Run Europe* 70-1.

¹⁰⁴ Mazey, *Gender Mainstreaming in the EU* 37.

almost by definition, simply more time is needed to determine how sustained the increase observed here will be.¹⁰⁵

Future research will also have to take into consideration the impact of the 1999 Commission crisis. Subsequent to the resignation of the Santer Commission and scandals in the administration, the Commission has embarked on a far-reaching reform of the Commission.¹⁰⁶ If mainstreaming advocates manage to frame their demands in terms of meritocracy and organizational efficiency, then they are likely to succeed in including their proposals in the larger reform. The new *Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005)* is promising in that it continues the 'dual strategy' of gender mainstreaming and positive action and makes as two of its five objectives the equal representation and participation in decision-making, and the changing of gender roles and overcoming of stereotypes.¹⁰⁷

More uncertain appears to be the fate of gender impact assessment, arguably a core component of gender mainstreaming, as it becomes integrated into a comprehensive impact assessment. The authors of the *Annual Report on Equal Opportunities 2002* at DG Employment and Social Affairs, certainly share the concern that it "remains however for individual DGs to ensure that the impact assessments they conduct also take gender impact into account."¹⁰⁸ Perhaps this is a first test for how deep the policy innovation gender mainstreaming has actually reached into the Commission's practices. If gender mainstreaming has approximated anything like a status of 'normal procedure', or what Commissioner Flynn has called "a gender assessment reflex",¹⁰⁹ then it should continue to be employed under the new rules.

The long term prospects also raise the question of how much change is necessary for the strategies to be 'successful'. The number of women in highest positions of decision-making is, after all, still unacceptably low. Mazey, similar to others scholars, proposes that a critical mass of 30% will be necessary to result in any substantial transformation of the policy process.¹¹⁰ The European Commission in its 2001-2005 Framework Strategy aims for 'realistic' short-term targets. In the long run, however, the equal representation of women and men is a clearly set goal.¹¹¹ The target for expert groups and committees, which is for the most part far from being achieved, is set at 40%.

The admittedly patchy and preliminary data presented here, suggests an overall success of gender mainstreaming measures, particularly when compared to the two previous stages of equal opportunity policies. Of course, gender mainstreaming does not replace the other policy sets, but builds on top of them. When comparing the three strategies, gender mainstreaming still seems to fare best, as no sustained increase in the number of women in decision-making positions had happened before the mid-1990s. Still, it is somewhat surprising and to some extent suspicious that the change in the number of women in senior positions coincides so directly with the implementation of gender mainstreaming at the Community level. As Pollack and Hafner-Burton conclude, the "speed and

¹⁰⁵ Paul Sabatier encourages us to study policy innovations longitudinally over a decade or more in order to not come to a premature assessment of program performance, give room for learning effects to sink in, and to gain a better understanding of the significance of these policy innovations. Paul Sabatier, "Toward Better Theories of the Policy Process" *PS: Political Science & Politics* (1991) 147-56.

¹⁰⁶ One result of this process is the comprehensive document on staff reforms at the Commission. European Commission, *An Administration at the Service of Half a Billion People* (Brussels, DG Personnel and Administration, Spring 2002). It includes a chapter on "Working conditions and equal opportunities."

¹⁰⁷ European Commission, *Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union: Annual Report 2000* (Brussels: COM(2001) 179 final).

¹⁰⁸ European Commission, *Annual Report 2002*, 8.

¹⁰⁹ Padraig Flynn, speech held at the European Parliament hearing on Gender Mainstreaming (April 20, 1999; http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/employment_social/speeches/990420pf.html; accessed April 24, 2003).

¹¹⁰ Mazey, *Gender Mainstreaming in the EU* 41.

¹¹¹ European Commission, *Towards a Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality*.

efficiency with which the Commission has succeeded in introducing a gender perspective across a broad range of issue areas” is surprising. The “EU is rapidly emerging as one of the most progressive polities on earth in terms of its promotion of equal opportunities for women and men.”¹¹²

Against this, Mazey holds that “notwithstanding the considerable sums of money spent on gender awareness training, there is little evidence as yet to suggest that the idea of gender mainstreaming has become deeply embedded or institutionalized within the Commission.”¹¹³ The 2002 *Opinion on the Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming* by the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities mirrors such a cautious approach. While welcoming incorporation of gender issues into personnel policy and the Commission’s administrative reform, it finds fault with “insufficient human and budgetary resources and lack of gender expertise.”¹¹⁴ The exact enforcement mechanisms used to ensure gender mainstreaming is employed are also far from clear.

Can the lessons learned from the European Commission be applied to other cases? As noted above, issues of a male-dominated organizational culture are prevalent across most all bureaucracies. So is the under-representation of women in highest positions of decision-making. The comparison of different equal opportunities strategies holds even beyond the realm of public administrations. Annette Zimmer and her collaborators in their cross-national study of women in medical science – although they do not deal with gender mainstreaming – nevertheless come to the conclusion that the variation in equal treatment and especially affirmative action programs yields virtually no explanatory power for the representation of women at the top of medical science in universities.¹¹⁵ Gidengil and Vengroff similarly find no correlation between the introduction of affirmative action programs and the number of women in senior positions.¹¹⁶

What may then separate the European Union from other arenas of contestation over equal opportunities for men and women, is its relatively open and flexible opportunity structure and the continuous struggle over what its core and purpose is. With the European Women’s Lobby, feminist advocacy has long been influential at the European level. From the 1970s on, the Commission, eager to extend its legitimacy, embraced equal rights in the workplace and has expanded its influence from there. The Commission has also grown and evolved greatly over the past decades. In the process of expansion, its diverse multi-national culture may have been better able to adapt to the new responsibilities. It may, in fact, be harder to push for change in national organizations that are embedded in a synchronous cultural environment, which carries a stronger trajectory.¹¹⁷ In the end, it may be that the Commission owes some of its capacity for reform and progressive politics to the absence of one dominant culture, and to a general awareness of the subtleties of cultural differences among its civil servants.

Beyond these immediate questions of how distinct policy packages are able to increase the passive representation of women, future research will also have to take into account both the relationship between passive and active representation in organizations¹¹⁸, as well as the role that men in highest positions of decision making who are engaged in feminist activities play in promoting gender democratic policies.

¹¹² Pollack and Hafner-Burton, “Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union.” 450-1.

¹¹³ Mazey, *Gender Mainstreaming in the EU* 51.

¹¹⁴ European Commission Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, *Opinion on the Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming* (Brussels: DOC.EQOP 59-2001, rev. Feb. 2002 final) 14.

¹¹⁵ Zimmer et al., *Career Prospects of Women* 101.

¹¹⁶ Gidengil and Vengroff, “Representative Bureaucracy, Tokenism and the Glass Ceiling.”

¹¹⁷ See also Simon’s discussion of “mechanisms that can be used to enable organizations to deviate from the culture in which it is embedded.” Herbert Simon, “Bounded Rationality and Organizational Learning” 128.

¹¹⁸ For a review of this literature see Lael Keiser, Vicky Wilkins, Kenneth Meier, and Katherine Holland, “Lipstick and Logarithms: Gender, Institutional Context, and Representative Bureaucracy” *American Political Science Review* 96 (2002) 553-564.

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Appendix A

[Excerpt, my emphasis]

CONSOLIDATED VERSION OF THE TREATY ESTABLISHING THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

PART ONE PRINCIPLES

Article 2 (ex Article 2)

The Community shall have as its task, by establishing a common market and an economic and monetary union and by implementing common policies or activities referred to in Articles 3 and 4, to promote throughout the Community a harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of economic activities, a high level of employment and of social protection, equality between men and women, sustainable and non-inflationary growth, a high degree of competitiveness and convergence of economic performance, a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States.

Article 3 (ex Article 3)

1./ For the purposes set out in Article 2, the activities of the Community shall include, as provided in this Treaty and in accordance with the timetable set out therein:

[omitted]

2./ In all the activities referred to in this Article, the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women.

Article 13 (ex Article 6a)

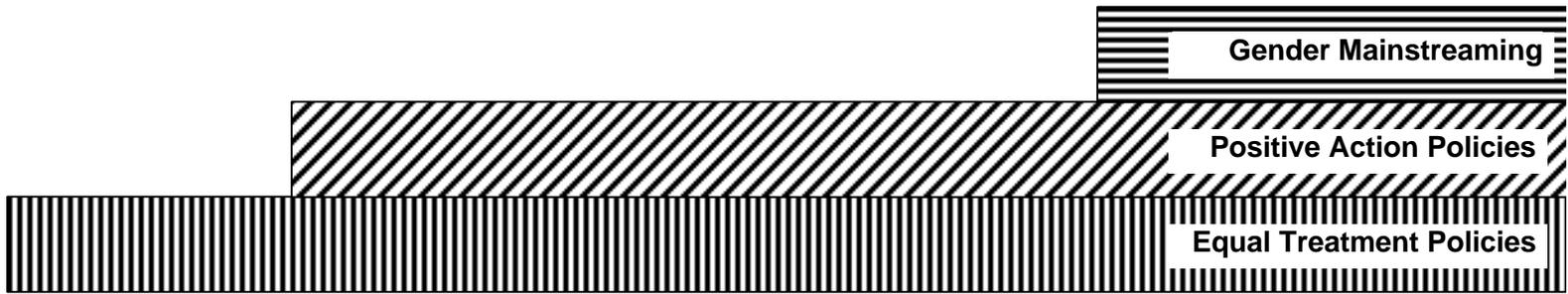
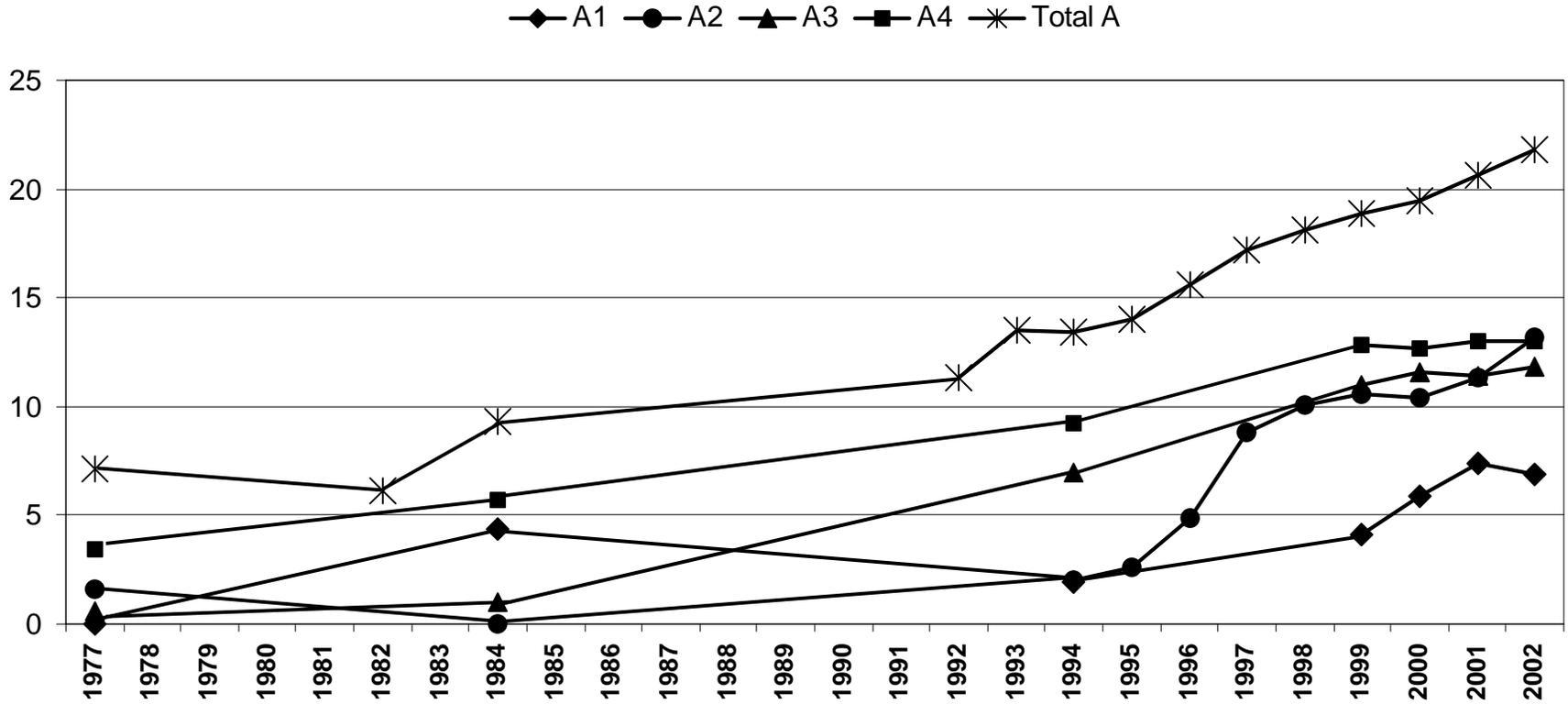
Without prejudice to the other provisions of this Treaty and within the limits of the powers conferred by it upon the Community, the Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Overview: Development of Equal Opportunity Measures in the European Union

Treaties	EC/ EU wide measures	Measures within the Commission	Membership in the EC/ EU	# of women commissioners	Classification
1957 Treaty of Rome (Art. 119)	1975 – 1 st directive 1976 – 2 nd directive 1978 – 3 rd directive		6 (B, D, F, I, L, NL) 9 (1973 + DK, IRL, UK) 10 (1981 + EL)	0 (0%)	} Equal Treatment Policies
1993 Treaty of Maastricht (Powers of the EP)	1982 – 1985 1 st Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities 1986 – 1990 2 nd Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities 1991 – 1995 3 rd Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities	1984 “Joint Committee on Equal Opportunities” (Report 1985) 1988 – 1990 1 st Action Programme 1991 EO-Unit 1992 – 1996 2 nd Action Programme	12 (1986 + ES, P) 15 (1995 + A, FIN, S)	2 (11.8%) (1989) 1 (5.9%) (1993-94) 5 (25 %) (1995) ‘Equality Group’	
1997 Treaty of Amsterdam (Art. 2, 3, 13)	1996 – 2000 4 th Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities 2001 – 2005 Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality	1997 – 2000 3 rd Action Programme Directorate General specific Action Plans 2002/ 2003 Integrated Impact Assessment			} Gender Mainstreaming

Women in Positions of Decision-Making in the Administration of the European Commission

% women 1977 – 2002 by staff grade



Sources: “1977” Schmitt von Sydow (1980); “1982, 1992, 1993” Spence (1994); “1984” Stevens (2001); all others DG Admin (2002).