WORKING FOR EUROPE?
SOCIALIZATION IN THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND AGENCIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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ABSTRACT: The trend toward flexible career arrangements has not left EU institutions untouched, as is manifest in the growing reliance on temporary and part-time officials. How does the increasing career hybridity within and across EU institutions affect European socialization, i.e. the extent to which officials embody the spirit of ‘working for Europe’ and adopt supranational norms? We conceptualize European socialization as a mutually reinforcing process shaped by the interaction of officials with the institutions of which they are members. We argue that a focus on career arrangements provides a good starting point as these arrangements shape individuals’ interaction with the organization. Consequently, they generate diverging socialization processes which lead to different socialization products. Our empirical insights are based on a study of different types of career arrangements within the European Commission bureaucracy and specialized and independent EU agencies through structured and semi-structured interviews and surveys with officials.

1. INTRODUCTION

In line with governance and management trends elsewhere, the institutions of the European Union (EU) have been readapting their organizational structures and career arrangements in the past decade. We witness a shift from hierarchical organizations with permanent staff to more networked forms of organization with fluid membership. This shift changes the characteristics of individuals’ interaction with the institution for which they work. Not only contracts but also contacts are temporary or part-time. The temporary or part-time character of contracts and contacts may lead to less investment in terms of formal and informal norm transfer on the part of the organization and less commitment in terms of norm adoption on the part of the employees. Flexible career arrangements thus not only affect one’s career opportunities but also one’s socialization into institutional norms. At the European level, these changes are likely to affect European socialization, that is, the extent to which officials embody the spirit of ‘working for Europe’ in the sense of adopting supranational norms and serving the overarching interests of Europe above and beyond particular national or professional interests.
Political scientists tend to conceptualize socialization as a process of “inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community” (Checkel 2005, p. 804). This conceptualization takes for granted that there is an organization that is actively inducting all its members into a pre-existing set of common norms and rules and that members are equally willing and able to be inducted into this organization. Conceptualized as such, socialization appears to be a top-down process with an in-built bias for unity and stability. In today’s hybrid organizations, including those of the EU, it is questionable whether we can still speak of socialization as a uniform process leading to uniform results for all employees. As the uniformity of socialization cannot be taken for granted for all EU organizations or employees, it needs to be empirically investigated by analyzing socialization as an open-ended process (Beyers 2010), especially in the current age of network organizations and flexible careers.

In this article, we therefore address the question: How do different career arrangements affect socialization, both as a process and as a product, in different EU institutions? We argue that a focus on career arrangements provides a good starting point as these arrangements shape individuals’ interaction with the organization, in terms of the duration and intensity of their contacts. Consequently, these career arrangements generate diverging socialization processes, which lead to different types of socialization products. To empirically substantiate our theoretical argument, we compare different organizational structures and career arrangements within the European Commission and agencies of the EU. Our data includes 217 structured and semi-structured interviews and 90 surveys conducted with officials working for the EU. By exploring socialization both as a process and as a product, theoretically as well as empirically, we thus fill a gap in the existing literature on European socialization.

We first lay out our theoretical argument by presenting the main concepts and relationships between these concepts (section 2). Then, we account for our methods and data (section 3). Next, we discuss our empirical findings in the case of the European Commission (section 4) and in the case of EU agencies (section 5). We conclude the article with an overview of our key findings and an assessment of the implications of our findings for studying socialization within EU institutions (section 6).

2. EXPLORING EUROPEAN SOCIALIZATION AS A PROCESS

‘An official shall carry out his duties and conduct himself solely with the interests of the Communities in mind; he shall neither seek nor take instructions from any government, authority, organisation or person outside his institution. He shall carry out the duties assigned to him objectively, impartially and in keeping with his duty of loyalty to the Communities.’ (European Communities 2004, Art. 11)
If there is one defining common norm binding all institutions of the EU, it is the idea of “working for Europe”. This supranational norm defines the jobs, the domain and scope of work of thousands of EU officials and is a core feature of the “EU corporate culture”. That is why we describe European socialization as a product, as the extent to which officials see themselves as serving the overarching interests of Europe above and beyond particular national or professional interests. As a process, European socialization then consists of the development over time of this spirit of working for Europe, promoting a sense of ‘we-ness’, and the activities taken up by both the individual and the organization to create commitment to the European project. We conceptualize European socialization as an open-ended process, the progress and result of which need to be empirically investigated instead of fixated to the ultimate form of internalization whereby the individual adopts the norms of the EU institutions as her/his own (Beyers 2010). As such, we aim to surpass the “process-product ambiguity” currently present in the European socialization literature (ibid), by looking explicitly into the dynamic (process) and static (product) aspects of socialization in the EU.

In previous research on international socialization, including European socialization, a series of variables have been identified as playing a role. Zürn and Checkel (2005) distinguish four general groups of conditions that trigger socialization mechanisms: properties of the institution, properties of the agent, properties of the issues/norms that are being transferred, and properties of the interaction between the agent and the institution. Among these conditions, we are primarily interested in the properties of the interaction, looking also into how the interaction emerges and evolves. We argue that the career arrangement of an official (the contract) affects the characteristics of the interaction s/he has with the EU institution (the contact) and, in turn, the socialization process and product (see Figure 1). Our argument thus incorporates variables identified by existing research on European socialization, but combines them so as to offer a comprehensive analysis.

FIGURE 1: *European socialization as a process and product*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of contract</th>
<th>Properties of interaction</th>
<th>European socialization as a process</th>
<th>European socialization as a product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Permanent</td>
<td>- Duration of contact</td>
<td>- Pre-socialization</td>
<td>- Internalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Temporary</td>
<td>- Intensity of contact</td>
<td>- Organizational learning</td>
<td>- Adaptation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Part-time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- No socialization</td>
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How supranational norms are defined can vary per EU institution, but formally all EU institutions have a supranational mission of “working for Europe”. In that sense we can speak of a European civil service and the existence of an esprit de corps (Georgakakis 2008). The complexity of investigating European socialization, however, derives from the varied backgrounds of officials and the multiple
layers on which they are active (Egeberg 2004, Trondal, Marcussen and Veggeland 2005). Their pre-socialization has taken place in various contexts (national and international). Through their jobs, they are exposed simultaneously to national, European and transnational ‘fields’ (Bigo 2011, p. 251). This ‘multiple embeddedness’ of EU officials means that they have to deal with different rules and expectations emanating from these different contexts (Beyers 2005). As a consequence, differences may occur with regard to how different officials enact supranational norms at various moments in time.

The extent to which an official “embodies the Community interest” or indeed is able and willing to embody the spirit of working for Europe depends on the official and her/his relation to the EU by the virtue of their involvement in EU governance through their particular role and function as an EU official. Existing research on role conceptualizations of EU officials differentiates between temporary and permanent European Commission officials (Trondal et al. 2005) and between full-time and part-time European Council working group participants (Beyers 2005). We accord career arrangements even a more central role in our model as we argue that the type of contractual bond of an EU official and the career opportunities provided within and beyond that contract shape the properties of the interaction between officials and their institutions. Officials’ organizational role and function are determined by their contract, which then determines the duration and intensity of their contact with the organization.

For our analysis, we distinguish between permanent, temporary and part-time officials of EU institutions. Whereas permanent officials are typically employed by one institution, often for their entire career, and are thus primarily bound to this institution, temporary officials may be employed by a single institution for a limited amount of time. Duration of their contact with the organization thus varies. They may also be attached simultaneously to another employer. Part-time employment means that the official is only present at the EU institution for conducting a pre-defined task for a short amount of time. In practice, this might mean meeting once per month or even less. A part-time EU official is thus employed elsewhere for most of the time, often also at a geographically distant location both from Brussels and agency headquarters. The distance to the center of governance arguably affects the intensity of an official’s contact with the organization. As such, temporary and part-time officials are exposed to multiple contexts and have to find ways as to perform their job in these contexts, which presumably has consequences for their European socialization.

We argue that these career arrangements and properties of interaction affect the process and, consequently, the product of socialization. To reach a thorough understanding of European socialization, we need to integrate the different aspects of the socialization process that are at play at different points in time, in particular pre-socialization through self-selection (agent) and selection (organization) and the organizational learning through the transfer (organization) and adoption (agent) of norms.
Previous research on European socialization integrates pre-socialization into their analyses by singling out background variables characterizing individuals and testing them against each other, so as to compare the effect of primary socialization, for instance in national contexts, with the effect of secondary socialization in EU institutions, for which the duration (Hooghe 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2005), intensity and density of contacts (Beyers 2005) are used as proxies. However, as recent research on the Commission has shown, pre-socialization in the case of Commission officials has a highly multi-national character (Suvarierol 2011) which points to the fact that European socialization has begun years before officials have been recruited and hence to the importance of taking account of pre-socialization. Recruitment procedures are equally important as they shape processes of self-selection and selection by determining the requirements of belonging to a given EU institution, aspects which recently have begun to receive more attention from scholars (Ban 2010, Georgakakis 2010).

The process of organizational learning typically consists of formal processes of norm transfer, such as initiation and training courses for employees, and informal processes of norm transfer such as daily efforts to shape and correct organizational behavior (Cable and Parsons 2001). Organizational learning processes are an under-researched area in EU studies (Beyers 2010). Qualitative research on European Commissioners (Joana and Smith 2002) and members of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) (Lewis 2005) refers to the strength of informal norm transfer and adoption emerging as a result of relatively long-term and intense interaction between group members.

Besides for the recent studies of Ban (2010) on new member state officials, we know little, however, about the extent to which EU officials are exposed to what kind of formal and informal socialization efforts and to what extent they adopt these norms.

With regard to European socialization as a product, we explore three possibilities with regard to the outcome of socialization, two in which socialization is present (internalization and adaptation) and one in which socialization is absent. There is evidence that officials who have direct experience with the EU institutions and their norms on a daily basis adopt supranational norms (Laffan 2004, Risse 2004). More recently, Suvarierol (2011) has shown that Commission officials’ identities undergo a transformation as a result of which they embrace supranational norms. This evidence points to internalization, officials embracing the idea of working for Europe to the extent that it may become a part of their identity. The research on Commission SNEs has shown that European socialization, if present at all, does not have a long-lasting effect (Trondal, Van den Berg and Suvarierol 2008). Rather than internalization we see adaptation, officials adjusting and conforming to the supranational norms for a limited amount of time and to a limited extent, or the absence of socialization, officials not adopting the European spirit even when it is called for as a part of their role as EU officials, as possible products of socialization processes. Indeed, we argue that the results of European socialization may be hybrid, even for officials working for the same EU institution.
Through our empirical analysis, we aim to identify which elements of the socialization process (pre-socialization, organizational learning) lead to which outcomes (internalization, adaptation, or no socialization) within (permanent, temporary, part-time) and across different EU institutions (Commission and agencies).

3. METHODS AND DATA

Our empirical analysis focuses on officials of the European Commission and agencies of the European Union in order to demonstrate the variation in socialization processes and products. Established in 1951 as the High Authority, the Brussels-based European Commission – the EU’s executive – is by now a middle-aged organization with established organizational structures and practices. Located from Lisbon to Helsinki and from Dublin to Bratislava, EU agencies are relatively new additions to the EU institutional architecture, with their creation really taking off in the 1990s. They primarily have an advisory or information gathering role, supporting the EU’s executive in the policy process.

Whereas the Commission has become a common object of socialization studies, agencies, partly due to their newness, have only attracted limited attention in this regard. Comparative investigations are lacking until now. Both are public organizations operating at the European level and EU agencies are sometimes referred to as “mini-Commissions” because they have to follow the Commission’s financial and staff regulations (Schout and Pereyra 2011). A closer look reveals very different organizational contexts, however. Much of the discourse surrounding the creation of EU agencies as well as the early years of agency creation emphasized agencies’ “independence”, which would allow them to provide technical and scientific assessments, removed from the political considerations of the Commission and the member states (see Groenleer 2009, Busuioc 2012, Busuioc and Groenleer forthcoming).

In terms of their organizational history, function, structure and even location, we can consider the European Commission as the most core institution and the agencies of the EU as the most peripheral, which is likely to affect the extent to which their officials adopt supranational norms. Not only may investigation of hybridity in career arrangements in the Commission and agencies present novel empirical insights, studying these different organizational contexts also allows us to maximize variation with regard to the conditions specified in our analytical framework and to explore the effects on socialization.

We rely on four datasets: two on the Commission and two on agencies. The first dataset was collected in 2005 by interviewing 82 AD-level European Commission officials, working for the ‘Social Regulation DGs’ Employment, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities; Environment; Health and Consumer Protection; and Justice, Freedom, and Security. The interviews included both closed
and open questions. The respondents quoted from this dataset are referred to as permanent officials and labeled as CO#.

The second dataset obtained in 2006, comprised of two groups of Dutch SNEs, focuses on the identities and allegiances of Dutch SNEs. This dataset is composed of a written survey of 90 Dutch national experts divided into two groups: one group of officials who were at that point working as SNEs at the European Commission in 2006 and one group of “former” SNEs who had been seconded between 2001 and 2005. For both groups of respondents, the survey was followed up with semi-structured interviews with 28 of these officials. The respondents quoted from this dataset are referred to as temporary officials or seconded national experts and labeled as SNE#.

The two datasets on agencies consist of interview data gathered in the course of two separate yet complementary qualitative studies: 67 semi-structured interviews with both current and former management board members, agency officials including directors, and scientific or technical experts and 40 semi-structured interviews with management board representatives and agency directors. The interviews were conducted between 2005 and 2011 and span eight EU agencies, varying in terms of size and powers as well as policy area. They include: the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), the European Environment Agency (EEA), the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA), the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) (now transformed into the Fundamental Rights Agency – FRA), the EU’s judicial cooperation unit (Eurojust), the European Police Office (Europol), and the Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market (OHIM). The respondents quoted from these two data sets are referred to as either MBM# for management board members, AO# for agency officials including directors, or AE# for experts.

Even though we rely on a broad empirical basis, we do not claim any representativeness or generalizability of our results. Our aim is rather to explore a theoretical argument on the basis of the empirical data we have gathered on the European Commission and EU agencies. We address the shortcomings of our approach and suggest avenues for further research in the concluding section of this paper.

4. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION: SERVING THE PEOPLE OF EUROPE?

Serving the people of Europe – What the European Commission does for you – title of a brochure introducing the European Commission (European Communities 2005)

The European Commission is a bureaucratic institution with almost 33,000 employees, characterized by strict recruitment procedures and a hierarchical career ladder. Policy officials of the Commission consist of generalists as well as specialists, hired through competitive exams (concours). Even though the majority of Commission staff is permanent and has tenure for life, currently almost one third of
the Commission’s staff consists of officials hired on a temporary basis. The hiring of temporary officials is linked to budgetary constraints and to changing agendas that require extra expertise (Suvarierol and Van den Berg 2008, p. 106), but the increase in their numbers has been also linked to the post-2000 administrative reform policies (Georgakakis and Weisbein 2010, p. 100). Seconded national experts, constitute a special type of temporary officials as their appointment aims to create a synergy between the Commission and member states through the exchange of expertise (know-how) and networks (know-who) (Suvarierol and Van den Berg 2008, p. 113). SNEs are hired on a temporary basis for a term varying between six months to four years. SNEs work in units that are related to their area of expertise in their member state and fulfill tasks similar to other policy officials. There are currently more than 20,000 permanent officials and 1,000 SNEs working for the Commission.

4.1 Permanent Officials

Aspiring permanent Commission officials start investing in their future career beforehand by speaking their European languages well, building up an international Curriculum Vitae (CV) through their EU studies and work experience in Brussels (Suvarierol 2007, 2011). The selection process, the concours organized by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO), is also a long one with strong self-selective and selective effects (Ban 2010) and which increasingly gives priority to Brussels insiders (Suvarierol 2007, 2011) such as ex-trainees who are already perceived as colleagues (Ban 2010). Prospective fonctionnaires already make a huge investment and commitment by deciding to go for the competition which involves months of studying for tough written and oral exams and months of waiting to be appointed for a position (Ban 2010). During their preparation for the concours they already familiarize themselves with the EU, its history and norms. Permanent officials have thus already been pre-socialized to the EU or in some cases even to the Commission as an organization, a quality which increases a candidate’s chances during the selection rounds.

Even though some officials may be pre-socialized, once they join the Commission, permanent officials go through an obligatory four-day initiation program. Whilst introducing officials to the institutions and procedures of the EU, these initiation days are also a good opportunity to meet and socialize with peer officials (CO#19). As they progress in their career, they follow various training courses on drafting, management, and language skills, based on the needs of their function. These courses are then taken up in their career development portfolio. Following the Weberian model, permanent officials typically enter the Commission at the lowest ranks and climb up the hierarchical ladder throughout their career.

Permanent officials are appointed for life, unless they decide to leave themselves. As such, they commit themselves to a life and career in Brussels (or in other countries where the Commission has representations). The Commission enjoys primacy in the careers and sometimes also in the private lives of permanent officials. As Belgian officials point out in the interviews, in contrast to Belgians
who have a private life consisting of their family and friends, the lives of permanent officials of other nationalities tend to revolve around the Commission (Suvarierol 2009). Permanent officials thus submerge themselves fully in the life in and around the Commission. Furthermore, the investment is made for a lifetime. During their time at the Commission, there are no organizations to which they have to pay loyalty and adjust themselves. Recent research on new member state officials in the Commission shows that the sense of working for Europe occurs quite quickly, as fresh officials indicate their feeling of working for a higher European goal as Commission officials, which is especially activated when they represent the Commission abroad (Ban 2010).

Collegiality and intra-Commission mobility are factors that contribute to the esprit de corps in the Commission. Even though loyalty to the DG is strong (Trondal 2010), and officials adjust themselves to the norms of the policy field to which their DG belongs, for generalist Commission officials, the sectoral belonging is of a temporary nature (Suvarierol 2007). For specialist officials, however, the specific policy field and the professional norms tend to dominate. Veterinarians who work in the field of animal health are a good example. In their own words, the ‘vets’ have a ‘clique’, ‘in-group’ of their own as they share a common worldview, hands-on approach, and jargon (CO#114, #116, #120). Specialist officials also tend to stay in the same DG throughout their careers (Georgakakis 2010), which is a position similar to that of SNEs (see below).

Commission officials are encouraged and sometimes even obliged to change units or DGs during their career at the Commission (Suvarierol 2007, Wille 2008, Trondal 2010). This mobility contributes to a feeling of belonging to the Commission as a whole – whereas one might change units or DGs, the allegiance to the Commission remains. Furthermore, as officials move throughout the organization they share and disseminate the experiences and norms of particular units, DGs or policy areas. Mobility thus not only contributes to an organization-wide esprit de corps, but also to an accumulation of organizational learning and experiences within the Commission. Ultimately, however, Commission officials are all aware that they work for one big organization. The sense of belonging to the European corps is supported by logistical and symbolic measures such as the Commission badge, which allows officials to enter all EU buildings. This was an aspect which one ex-SNE found remarkable since in his home country, officials of ministries have to go through security checks outside their own ministry (SNE#88).

Pre-socialization, formal and informal organizational learning, together with organizational structures and symbols inculcate and reinforce the spirit of working for Europe. The fact that permanent officials are exposed to this environment on a daily and long-term basis makes their socialization process ongoing which seems to have significant effects on the norms of Commission officials. They stress that they have ‘changed’ after they have started working for the Commission (CO#3, #17, #22, #67). An official has even termed the process as ‘assimilation’ (CO#72). Even their sense of “the Self and the Other” changes (Suvarierol 2011, p. 193) which points to a deep-seated
change of perceptions. These findings lead us to conclude that in the case of permanent Commission
officials we can speak of European socialization as internalization.

4.2 Seconded National Experts
By the nature of their contract, SNEs remain attached to two organizations simultaneously (European
and national), as they remain paid by their member state organization and only receive a daily
allowance from the Commission and are expected to return to their organization after their
secondment period. SNEs are typically appointed to one unit and DG. As such, their position within
the Commission is stable during their secondment period (unless their unit or DG is involved in a
reorganization process). This probably also explains why SNEs’ primary allegiance is first to their
unit and then to their DG. Being exempt from the possibility of mobility, SNEs are only exposed to
the one set of sectoral norms. In that sense, their organizational learning is located in a single unit
and DG of the Commission instead of multiple units and DGs (as is the case for the permanent officials).

SNEs are recruited by their respective unit that receives the applications of SNE candidates
from different member states, makes a shortlist, and finally selects an SNE, usually after an interview.
Their CV, field of expertise, and fit with the job weigh the heaviest in their selection, as opposed to
international pre-socialization. Compared to the concours, the selection procedure is far less
demanding and time-consuming. Once recruited, SNEs are excluded from obligatory formal training
in the Commission. They may, however, participate in training schemes offered for Commission
officials, such as those given by the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) at their own
initiative.5

SNEs are also excluded from regular performance evaluations as they are officially employed
by their national organization. SNEs are not allowed to occupy management positions or to represent
the Commission vis-à-vis third parties. These limitations on their position stress the fact that they are
not full members of the organization. This can also be interpreted as the recognition of their ‘double-
hatted’ position and thus as a way of safeguarding the SNEs against finding themselves in awkward
positions. Alternatively, this could be viewed as a sign of mistrust. The SNEs cannot make career
advancement during their period at the Commission, nor can they represent the Commission when
they prove their loyalty to the Community interest. As such, they partly remain outsiders and are
perceived as such by the permanent officials.

Although SNEs move to Brussels during their secondment, they actively maintain their ties
with the homeland: They follow the news daily through the national newspapers (SNE#31, #35); they
frequently visit friends and family (SNE#20); and they try to remain visible for their home ministry
(SNE#3, #64, #65). SNEs thus have one leg in Brussels and another in their home country. This effect
is probably even stronger for certain SNEs due to the proximity of their homeland to Brussels.
According to a Dutch SNE, ‘Dutch functionaries have much less contacts with the Netherlands and
Dutch ministries. They do not know whom to call. They do not know the Netherlands that well. They

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are already gone for a long time. I read the Dutch newspaper every day. They not anymore.’ (SNE#31) SNEs are thus professionally much more connected to their country of origin than permanent Commission officials.

The social contacts of SNEs with permanent officials outside of work also remain limited. Permanent officials tend to invest more time in those who are to stay long-term in Brussels (CO#17). Understandably, neither SNEs nor Commission officials are willing to invest much time and energy in temporary friendships. By contrast, the social lives of SNEs tend to be geared toward the home country and other compatriots in Brussels (SNE#20, #35, #61). They participate in SNE networks – such as the CLENAD (Liaison Committee of the Detached National Experts) – or in national networks – such as those formally organized by the Permanent Representation or those informally organized by group members (squash group, women’s lunch, etc.) (SNE#19).

Our quantitative and qualitative data show that SNEs see their job at the Commission as a temporary phase in their life. Only two of the 44 SNEs (4.5%) who had completed their secondment pursued their career at the European Commission and one at the European Council. The few SNEs who decide to continue their career in the Commission have to go through the same recruitment procedures as permanent officials. Accordingly, one would expect these SNEs to invest more in the Commission in line with their career goals, as soon as they have decided to compete in the concours.

The supranational norm of representing the interests of the EU as a whole as opposed to that of particular member states is central to working for the Commission. This is confirmed by the enforcement of this norm across the organization, even for national experts and Commissioners who work for the Commission temporarily. Commissioners who openly defend national interests have been reported to be dismissed by their colleagues who characterize this as “COREPER behavior” (Joana and Smith 2002). Similarly, SNEs are well aware that they have less authority within the Commission and amongst their colleagues if they sound as “member state representatives” (SNE#31). Abiding by the supranational norm is hence emphasized a significant marker of belonging to the institution.

In terms of compliance with supranational norms, our findings point to mixed signals with regard to the expectations from SNEs. On the one hand, they are formally and informally reminded of their role as Commission officials, which prevents them from defending the interests of their member-state. On the other hand, the fact that they may not represent the Commission stresses the fact that they partly remain quasi-members of the organization and are not given full responsibilities. This may in turn lower the incentives of SNEs to adopt the norms of the Commission since norm compliance does not give them extra power or access in the organization. This ambiguity in the Commission’s signals was also reciprocated in the fact that SNEs expressed to have always felt a double loyalty towards the Commission and their host DG on the one hand and their sending organization on the other hand during their time at the Commission. Hence, SNEs partly work for Europe, partly for their
member state. As a result of their simultaneous investment at two levels, their frame of reference does not shift completely from the national to the European level.

The product of European socialization for SNEs, however, has not proven to be lasting, or at least not to remain at the same level. Whilst maintaining a higher loyalty to the EU system as a whole than before they were seconded, SNEs switched their loyalties from the Commission to their ministries upon return to their home countries at the end of their secondment (Trondal et al. 2008). Their loyalty clearly lies with the Commission as long as they work for the Commission though. As one SNE remarked tellingly during an interview pointing at the building of the Council Secretariat across the main Commission building Berlaymont, “We are not member state representatives. They are at the Council” (SNE#25). Yet, SNEs’ loyalty to the Commission is limited due to their short-term EU involvement and long-term investment in their life and career in their national field. As a result, SNEs do not seem to internalize but just temporarily adapt to the norms of working for Europe.

5. AGENCIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: WORKING FOR US?

*EU agencies: Whatever you do, we work for you* – title of a brochure introducing the agencies of the EU (European Communities 2007)

Agencies are (quasi-)autonomous, usually small-scale organizational entities, ranging from not even 50 to over 700 staff members, governed by management boards mostly comprised of member state representatives. As opposed to Commission staff, agency staff members are not career civil servants. Agencies were amongst other reasons created in light of their ability to cope with a varying workload and to replace staff more easily. Thus, as a rule, agencies employ their staff on a temporary basis. According to recent figures, agencies – currently 34 in total – employ well over 3000 temporary agents, whereas they employ ‘only’ around 600 permanent officials (Schout and Pereyra 2011). Moreover, in discharging their tasks, agencies rely heavily on networks of scientists or technical experts, in the case of some agencies numbering several thousands. We examine three pools of agency officials: agency staff, experts on scientific committees or panels, and management board members.

5.1 Agency staff

Staff recruitment is the agency director’s responsibility. Selection is based on specific scientific or technical knowledge in a particular field, or more general administrative or regulatory expertise, whilst maintaining a balance with regard to geographic distribution. As opposed to the Commission staff, agency staff members are not career civil servants. Whereas Commission officials are predominantly generalists, agency staff is largely made up of specialists.
Hence, recruitment of agency staff is subject to procedures different from those applicable to the Commission. In order to attract staff with a high level of expertise on a flexible basis, agency staff does not have to go through the concours. For that reason, agencies’ selection procedures are sometimes perceived as a backdoor for easy entry into the European civil service. Agencies, however, are not included among the mobility clause, that is, agency staff cannot move freely between agencies and the EU institutions (Groenleer 2009, see also Schout and Pereyra 2011). This also makes it unattractive for staff of the EU institutions to apply for a job with an agency. As a consequence, agencies such as the EEA experience difficulties in recruiting qualified, experienced – and pre-socialized – personnel that could often easily be found in the Commission (AO#27).

Agencies, as a rule, employ their staff on a temporary basis. The idea behind temporary contracts at agencies is the exchange of expertise between the EU and the national level and the diffusion among member states (AO#20). When staff returns to their former positions at the national level, they take with them knowledge about the EU, its institutions and policies, and, ideally, have internalized its values and norms, “what it stands for”. Yet, once their contracts have formally expired, staff in some instances can get a renewal for an indefinite period without their position becoming permanent. In the case of EMA staff members after ten years qualify for an “unlimited temporary contract” (AO#9, AO#33). The ratio between temporary and permanent posts varies from agency to agency, depending on the nature of the agency’s tasks. Some agencies perform more tasks that have a “permanent” character than others. Moreover, agency directors consider a certain level of permanent staff necessary to maintain quality and expertise and, thereby, uphold their independence vis-à-vis the Commission and the member states: “If you really want to be an independent agency, you should have permanent staff” (AO#27).

It is ironic to note that because their possibilities to move around are limited and their contracts are often renewed for an indefinite period, many temporary agents have actually become permanent officials. The turnover rate in some agencies is low and the reality is that their staff is employed long-term (Groenleer 2009). While the duration and intensity of their contact with the organization thus is high, and this contributes to their socialization (AO#20), it has raised concerns, particularly with regard to maintaining scientific dynamism. Indeed, there is a risk of agencies becoming “fossilized” (#AO27). In 2006, agency directors therefore signed a Memorandum of Understanding to facilitate staff moving from one agency to another, therewith increasing career opportunities for staff in EU agencies whilst at the same time ensuring the exchange of best practices between agencies (AO#56).

As agency staff does not have to go through the concours, the “raw material” that agencies have to work with is potentially much more varied than in the case of the Commission, at least when it comes to being pre-socialized into supranational norms. Agencies differed in the extent to which they relied on young and talented individuals instead of more experienced senior people. In the case of EMA, staff recruited was young, with the advantage that they could easily be inculcated with
certain norms on how to go about their job. Other agencies, such as Europol and Eurojust, instead preferred hiring experienced staff given that their previous work experience is a valuable asset in enhancing the performance of the agencies’ work.

Most agencies, at least initially, did not have their own induction programs. Given that offices were usually small, staff members were frequently working together, and thus got to know each other quickly (cf. Lewis 2005), such programs were often not considered necessary. Several agencies did create their own restaurants or sports facilities and organize social events for staff. For example, at Europol, staff met for drinks after working hours in the agency bar and gathered to celebrate national holidays such as Sinterklaas. Such facilities and events, according to several interviewees, have contributed to the development of a certain degree of *esprit de corps* within agencies (AO#8, AO#10, AO#12, AO#41).

Some agencies provided their staff with education and training, but this primarily concerned the transfer of agency-specific knowledge on administrative systems or regulatory procedures, not necessarily supranational EU norms (AO#20). In a few cases, such as EASA, staff takes courses on the EU institutions and EU policy making. Since the inclusion of agencies in the Commission’s revised staff regulations in 2004, agencies have had to introduce training plans and career development systems, which are more oriented towards traditional bureaucratic organizations with a hierarchical structure such as the Commission. Our investigation shows this has to a certain extent served as a means of building up staff’s loyalty to the agency, but the effects on European socialization remain unclear.

There is a difference between agency staff having more general administrative or regulatory expertise and those having scientific or technical knowledge in a particular field (e.g. food scientists in EFSA or aerospace engineers in EASA). The former typically are more loyal to the agency’s institutional interests through their often more permanent role in EU governance. The latter generally are more loyal to their specific professional group and do not automatically have an international orientation. That is also not what recruiters at EU agencies are looking for. As an EMA official said: “We are looking for oncologists, who have ten, fifteen years of experience in oncology, not in [speaking foreign] languages” (AO#56). Agencies are not seeking to hire individuals who are well-versed in the institutions and policies of the EU, its values and norms, and who are committed to the European project, but individuals who possess specialist knowledge, expertise in a particular field.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, we did not find particularly high levels of European socialization in the cases we studied, at least not with regard to the supranational mission of ‘working for Europe’. There is no evidence that agency staff working in agencies on a daily basis adopts supranational norms. This at least partly results from the geographical distance from Brussels, the fact that agencies are not located in the political center, together with most other EU institutions; it also is an effect of the very institutional separation between agencies as specialized bodies and the Commission and the member states. The grown coherence among agencies in terms of the procedures involved in
recruitment and selection has not only enabled inter-agency mobility, it has also furthered the “emancipation” of agencies from the main EU institutions, the development over time of a sense of ‘we-ness’ among agencies and their staff. As independent institutions, many agencies try not to be identified with the main EU institutions and some do not even fly the European flag outside their premises (Groenleer 2009).

Yet, that agency staff has not internalized ‘working for Europe’ as part of their identity does not mean that it is not ‘working for us’. We can distinguish two types of commitment among agency staff. First, the allegiance of more or less permanently employed officials to EU agencies as independent yet European institutions, increasingly beyond their own agency. Second, the type of commitment that Majone (2000, see also Merton 1957, Gouldner 1958) referred to as ‘cosmopolitan’, that is, the loyalty of more or less temporary agency staff to the rules, criteria and standards of the transnational professional group (see also Trondal et al. 2008). Both types signify adaptation: officials adopt the European spirit only to the extent that it concerns EU agencies at large (and one might thus argue that officials to some degree internalize “working for the EU agencies”) or their specific professional group.

5.2 Scientific or technical experts

Much of the actual work of agencies is done by scientists or experts, as part of committees or panels. They are usually appointed by agency management boards on the basis of their specific knowledge or expertise. In some cases they are nominated by the member states, which must refrain from giving experts instructions that conflict with the tasks they perform for the agency. Often, experts work in national agencies in the same policy field, but they also may be working for or simultaneously affiliated with universities or research institutes. They meet regularly at the agency in order to, for instance, draft decisions and opinions, but they are not paid by the agency apart from reimbursement for travel and lodging. For the very reason that ‘scientific advice has to come from many sources and be decentralized both for scientific demands and the agency’s independence’ (MBM#66, but see AE#77), they are not in-house but external experts.

Most of these experts are not pre-socialized into a multi-national context in the way Commission or even “permanent” agency officials are. They either choose to be part-time employed with an EU agency to undertake a predefined task, or are chosen by their national agency to do so. In both cases, experts do not necessarily work for Europe, in the sense of prioritizing EU’s supranational norms. They are primarily guided by the rules, criteria and standards of the professional group to which they belong, just like a lot of temporary agency staff. This professional group – even when it comes to experts nominated by the member states – is not merely oriented towards the national level, but also towards the European and transnational level. Experts meet each other frequently, also outside the work they undertake for the EU agency (AE#45) and, even though they may not be fluent in English, they speak the same ‘professional language’. As a national expert working for EMA said:
“As a result of the numerous and lengthy meetings, we are much more than a gathering of civil servants, we are a big family” (AE#3).

Since experts are not automatically loyal to the institutional interests of the particular EU agency with which they are only part-time employed, some agencies have made arrangements to encourage interaction among staff and experts, thereby promoting socialization. For instance, as experts usually spend almost a week at EMA, the agency provided them with offices, the so-called bureaux de passage. Even though they are not formally staff, the agency director considered it important for the organization’s internal cohesion that ‘[t]hey are not treated differently than staff’ (AO#9, AO#57, AO#75). As a result of the increased intensity of contact with the agency, not only the level of commitment of agency experts but also the unity between experts and staff appears to have increased (Groenleer 2009).

Participation of experts in cross-border networks, be they scientists or professionals, makes them aware of similarities as well as differences and may stimulate mutual learning processes (see also Groenleer, Kaeding and Versluis 2010). For example, the system through which national experts rotate in Europol is supposed to mold ‘European police officers’ rather than Europol officials. The whole idea is to further cooperation among national experts through developing common values and beliefs (AO#8). Experts, called Europol Liaison Officers (ELOs), are for example located together in the same building and use English in their communication. Rather than upholding Europe-wide interests, which is almost impossible in a still very much nationally dominated field, the office serves as a platform for the exchange of best police practices and contributes, albeit in a limited way, to overcoming the cultural differences that still keep alive the mistrust among police officers in the member states (AE#16, AO#18).

Majone (2000) expected national experts’ involvement with EU agencies to transform them from “locals” into “cosmopolitans”, shifting their allegiance from the national to the European or transnational level. Such a transformation has, at least partly, occurred at EMA, where national experts are considered part of the agency and see themselves as part of a European system of medicines evaluation. But it did only slowly or not at all occur in other agencies such as the EUMC. Cooperation in the framework of the EUMC’s information gathering framework was characterized by continuous disagreement between national experts and agency staff over common definitions and data comparability (AE#4).

Whereas national experts may not in all cases have developed supranational or agency allegiances, they generally operate in an independent fashion. Expert decisions and opinions are based on professional rules, criteria and standards, rather than national interests or supranational norms (AE#3, AE#77). In the committees and panels, scientific reasoning and technical arguments are prevalent. Even more so than agency staff, experts thus adapt to the norms of working for Europe. Again this does not mean that they are not ‘working for us’. The mere fact that most experts render their services unpaid and spend quite some travelling to participate in agency work is evidence for
their commitment to the overarching goals of the European project, at least where it coincides with the norms of their transnational professional group.

5.3 Management board members

Management boards are at the apex of the agencies’ organizational structure. They are hybrid bodies, simultaneously external and internal to the organization. While on the one hand, they are in charge of overseeing the agency and its director, on the other hand, they have a specific internal mandate (as provided by constituent act) to steer the agency, to decide on its strategy and to approve core agency documents (work program, annual report, budget). Increasingly, in addition to specifying their tasks within the agency, constituent acts also explicitly provide that board members ‘shall act independently and objectively in the sole interest of the Union as a whole and shall neither seek nor take instructions from the Union institutions or bodies, from any government of a Member State or from any other public or private body’.

Boards are generally composed of one representative per each member state and one or two representatives from the European Commission and in some cases also representatives of the Parliament or relevant stakeholders. The EFSA and FRA boards take exception from this, as their boards are not made up of national representatives but instead are appointed in a personal capacity, on the basis of their professional background and expertise. With these exceptions, however, board members are appointed by their member state (or the Commission in the case of Commission representatives) and generally come from national ministries or agencies, where they remain employed in a full time function. They meet only few times per year – two to six times depending on the agency – usually at the headquarters of the agency. In the case of the Eurojust board (i.e. the “college”), the board members, as drivers of the operational work, are full-time in-house members for the duration of their mandate and meet twice-weekly in full format.

Board members are representatives of their member state, while, at the same time, in charge of and responsible for managing and steering a European body and overseeing its good performance. Thus, formally, they are ‘Janus-faced’ (Lewis 2005, p. 939), serving two masters by virtue of the multi-level nature of their attributions (Curtin and Egeberg 2008) and having to accommodate potentially conflicting roles. How do they reconcile these roles in practice? Do they remain entrenched in national positions or do they adopt new role conceptions that promote supranational norms?

Our empirical material reveals that a large number of board members display a low level of identification and involvement with the agency, low interest in agency matters and a focus on national issues (Busuioc 2010a, 2010b). This has been pinpointed by both directors and management board representatives (in relation to their board colleagues) alike. There is some variation, though. It is for instance less pertinent in the case of EEA and EFSA, given a strong de facto Commission presence in
the board, with member states generally following the Commission’s representatives, at least in the early years (see further Groenleer 2009; see also Busuioc 2009).

Board delegations are not always diligent about carrying out their EU-level roles and responsibilities. Whereas some board delegations are well prepared and on top of their game, the overwhelming number of member state representatives often do not participate in board discussions and are frequently poorly prepared for board meetings (MBM#32; also MBM#5, MBM#20). This occasionally reaches the point where board discussions take place between only a handful of representatives. An agency director described a regular board meeting as a conversation between four people ‘and the rest of the people sit there and fill in forms to get their travel costs reimbursed’ (AO#38; also MBM#17, MBM#32, AO#39, AO#45). These patterns were particularly strong in the case of EMA, EASA, Europol and OHIM.

What is more, board members tend to be predominantly preoccupied with aspects of the agencies’ functioning directly impacting on the national interest rather than agency performance. As described by another agency director ‘I’ve sat through some 25 meetings of our supervisory bodies and not once have they asked: “and how is the office going?” They are completely uninterested.’ In terms of their role perceptions of board representatives, one of the directors observed, ‘There are very few there who realize when they come to the board that they come as a servant of the European Community’ (AO#65). This is the case even for the only agency with an in-house board, the Eurojust college, characterized by frequent interactions, yet also reportedly lacking ‘a common identity as a European body’ (Ramboll Evaluation 2009, p. 171; also MBM #67).

Board members are strongly preoccupied with aspects affecting their national offices. This tendency is particularly strong in the case of fee-generating agencies (e.g. EASA, EMA and OHIM) where board representatives are often the heads of corresponding national agencies. As such, their national offices are either beneficiaries of the European agency’s work program and payment system or are in direct competition with the European agency. These tensions were most exacerbated in the case of OHIM, where reportedly there are sharp tradeoffs between European and national roles, manifest in tremendous conflicts of interest.

Boards largely composed of heads of national agencies act as a community of like-minded national bureaucrats, entrenched in national agency positions. These positions become reinforced at the EU level, which can in fact serve as a platform for mobilization around narrowly-drawn national interests rather than spurring the adoption of supranational norms: ‘They come to have their little get together and try to make sure what they perceive as “national interest”, which in reality is office interest, is not jeopardized. (…) So together they sort of celebrate a separate reality.’ (AO#65)

The observed patterns are however, not necessarily due to individual failings but rather a byproduct of the contract and contact with the agency of these types of officials. Board representatives remain at the same time fully employed within national ministries or parallel national level agencies. As ‘EU nomads’ (Thedvall 2007, p. 160), they are occasional players at the European
level with a strong national baggage and ‘come in with a focus on their national interests’ (Geuijen, ’t Hart, Princen and Yesilkagit 2008, p. 86). The domestic embeddedness of representatives, as identified in other institutional contexts (Beyers and Trondal 2004, Egeberg 2004, Beyers 2005), is thus, a plausible explanation for the observed patterns.

Moreover, board membership entails a much lower level of commitment to start with by comparison with permanent or even temporary positions. Whereas an EU job usually entails, as we saw earlier, relocation for the job, a change in life style, board members are employed full-time at the national level, continue to reside in their countries of origin and thus, expend little energy and investment on their superimposed roles at the EU level.

Overall, these findings lead us to conclude that board members remain national-minded bureaucrats, displaying a lack of European socialization. The empirical material indicates that board members have largely not come to terms with their role expectations at the EU level. While the nature of their roles may be “double-hatted”, in terms of actual administrative behavior, in many of the cases studied, the national hat often “trumps” the European one. This pattern becomes particularly visible in cases where working for Europe conflicts with working for the national office.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we explored the argument that the socialization process in international organizations, notably the institutions of the European Union, needs to be viewed as the result of the interaction between the socializing organization and the officials with varying career arrangements. On the basis of our empirical research we conclude that different career arrangements lead to different socialization processes and products within and across EU institutions. We thus stress the importance of scrutinizing career arrangements of officials for obtaining a more accurate picture of how socialization processes unfold through time. The socialization process differs for different EU officials throughout their interaction with the EU institution (see Table 1).
To begin with, permanent officials undergo much rigorous recruitment procedures than temporary officials. The EU *concours* is a case in point. Through various rounds of selection, prospective permanent officials of EU institutions are screened so as to see the extent to which their pre-socialization has already made them fit for working for the EU (Georgakakis 2008, 2010; Suvarierol 2011). Temporary officials only join the EU for a limited amount of time and thus are not expected to master its institutional norms thoroughly. They are subject to less rigorous formal and informal organizational learning. Whereas the SNEs are expected to comply with the norms of the Commission during their secondment, especially when it comes to guarding the European interests as opposed to the interests of their member states, they do not enjoy the same privileges and opportunities as the permanent officials. As a result, they sustain a feeling of double (or half) loyalty which is inherent to their career scheme. Nevertheless, (even the) SNEs do feel an allegiance to their unit, DG, and the Commission, as well as to the EU as a whole. The fact that SNEs shift their loyalties to their home ministries upon their return indicates the provisional nature of their socialization. That
their process of socialization is temporary instead of ongoing as is the case with permanent officials
seems to affect the product of their socialization: They adapt to, instead of internalizing supranational
norms. Future research on permanent officials who have left the Commission and other types of
temporary officials, such as contract agents, would highly improve our understanding of the extent to
which the process of socialization differs for them.

We observe variation between agency staff, experts on panels and committees and
management board representatives in terms of their European spirit. Even though differences are
slight, in the case of “permanent” agency staff involved in the administrative and regulatory aspects of
an agency’s function there is more attachment to the agency than in the case of in-house “specialized”
staff and external experts This is especially so now that (investing in) an agency career – for a variety
of reasons – is becoming more attractive. It is difficult to say whether this also amounts to EU
allegiance, as agencies (and their staff) perceive and present themselves as independent parts of the
EU’s machinery. On the whole, in-house specialists and external experts tend to be more committed
to their profession than to a particular agency, EU agencies in general, or the EU as such. Their level
of expertise thus seems to result in a different kind of socialization, i.e. a more professional one
(Egeberg 2004, Trondal et al. 2005). Their loyalty is not to the EU but to the rules, criteria and
standards of their professional group, be it nationally, at the European level or transnationally, and can
thus coincide with “working for Europe”.

The shift of allegiance from the national to the EU level is much more limited for the
management boards of agencies where national interests usually dominate. This is strongly related to
the fact that the latter’s career arrangements are linked to the national setting, which they continue to
be embedded in, with the exception of short agency interludes. This can have considerable
repercussions for the functioning of the agencies in question, as unlike Commission SNEs, which are
not given full responsibilities and cannot occupy management positions, agency boards are in charge
of agencies’ management and supervision. What is more, in the case of strong conflicting role
expectations of board members (e.g. in the case of fee-generating agencies), not only do board
members not display a shift of allegiance to the EU, but interactions with like-minded individuals at
the supranational level can in fact serve to reinforce narrowly drawn institutional and national
positions.

Distinguishing how different career arrangements shape European socialization is important
given the increasing emphasis on flexible work arrangements and networked forms of organization in
the EU and its institutions. Our findings do not bode well in terms of the inculcation of supranational
norms for officials who have not self-selected their position and are employed by the EU on a
temporary basis, such as management board members, but do assume an important role in ensuring
that their organization serves the purposes of the EU. This is, however, less the case for other
temporary agents such as SNEs and external agency experts whose nomination and/or appointment is
usually the result of a more deliberate choice for the EU and/or the profession. Our findings in terms
of more or less permanently employed agency officials are ambiguous: they are socialized only to a limited extent, and mostly in respect of the agency and its broader interests and goals, which do not necessarily have to align with the EU as a whole.

Our research aimed to explore the various factors at play that we have identified through our empirical research as factors leading to diverse socialization processes and products within and across EU institutions. Our empirical analysis – which, it should be noted, did not cover all types of officials – indicates that flexibilization of career arrangements at the EU level has significant consequences, on the one hand, for the loyalties of its employees and on the other, for upholding supranational norms. This is especially visible at the level of agencies where their creation as network organizations combined with the fact that they have a mixed pool of officials inhibits their efforts to assure institutional loyalty and to foster a European esprit de corps. Given the role of agencies and their place in the EU institutional architecture, as specialized and independent bodies, we argue that, as long as the professional norms prevailing in agencies and internalized by their staff do not contradict the spirit of ‘working for Europe’, this does not constitute a problem.

Although our analysis has focused specifically on EU institutions, we believe that our theoretical framework can be equally useful for scholars who analyze socialization empirically in other complex transnational governance structures that rely on networks of flexible officials. As our analysis has attempted to demonstrate, conceptualizing socialization as an open-ended process is much more fruitful in a world of hybrid career arrangements than starting off with static and unitary expectations as to the processes and products of socialization. Furthermore, multiple roles or commitments need not be mutually exclusive (Kauppi 2010, p. 27). Instead of conceptualizing European socialization as a matter of shifting allegiances from the national to the European level, socialization research has much to gain from studying how individuals accumulate and mobilize different skills in their interactions with different fields in which they are embedded. Insights from political sociology might in this sense be promising in providing useful frameworks and methods as they incite us to pay more attention to bottom-up processes within organizations and thus to analyzing the EU institutions and agents in practice (Georgakakis and Weisbein 2010, Kauppi 2010, Saurugger and Mérand 2010, Bigo 2011, Favell and Guiraudon 2011).

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Notes

1 These DGs have since then been re-organized and changed names.
2 This data set has been gathered in the framework of a joint project with Caspar van den Berg. We would like to thank him for allowing us to use the results and insights following from his data on ‘former’ Dutch SNEs.
3 See European Commission staff figures on: http://ec.europa.eu/civil_service/docs/hr_key_figures_en.pdf (accessed on 16 December 2011).
4 Idem.
5 Interview with an EIPA trainer, 26 January 2011.
6 This is the Dutch version of Santa Claus celebrated early December.
7 See, for instance, EMA, Statement of principles governing the partnership between the national competent authorities and the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products, EMEA/MB/013/97.final.
8 See, for instance, the constituent acts of the three European agencies in the financial sector.

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