Women in European Universities

RESEARCH AND TRAINING NETWORK

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Which Hammer Breaks the Glass Ceiling?
Women in Positions of Decision-Making in the European Union

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

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 1970s (Naff 2001, 17-9). In Europe, second-wave feminists have particularly used the European Union[1] as an opportunity structure to advance women's legal and substantive status (Mazey 2001, 19). However despite 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.

As Elisabeth Gidengil and Richard Vengroff (1997) show, 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. 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 (471).

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[1] 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 (e.g. Mazey 2001).

The question arises: what then explains the variation in the number of women in highest positions of decision-making? Alan Siaroff (2000) tested across 28 countries what factors account for the difference in the number of women in parliaments and cabinets. While the two groups are correlated, 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).

Both studies examined *external* factors as explanations for the differing representation of women in organizations. While Gidengil and Vengroff, when treating city size, levels of education, income and others as independent variables, find no more than random variation, which they label "deceptive" (1997, 476), Siaroff's findings similarily point toward additional *internal* mechanisms at work in organizations that can explain the under representation of women in positions of decision-making in even the most gender democratic societies. It is implausible to suggest that Protestantism as such or the year that women gained suffrage in a country will have any direct impact. Rather these indicators suggest informal constraints at work within organizations.[2] "[T]he glass ceiling seems to be stubbornly resistant to government actions to dislodge it" (Gildengil and Vengroff 1997, 475).

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 will be examined in this study. 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 also 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.

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[2] Clearly, *external* cultural traits will influence the mechanisms at work within organizations. But cross-national *similarities* in the under-representation of women in political and other institution (see for example Borggrefe et al. 2000) suggest the existence of distinct organizational mechanisms.

As will be elaborated further below (2.3), the latest strategy of *gender mainstreaming* 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.

With regard to normative questions, Katherine Naff shows that the importance of a representative bureaucracy 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 (Naff 2001, 1). 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 substantially increase the representativeness and legitimacy of an organization and likely transform general politics and policy-making. The question of a representative EU administration therefore represents yet another facet of the European Union's 'democratic deficit'.

Jo Shaw (2001) frames gender as fundamentally a question of power. In this sense, gender equality is inseparably linked to questions of governance in the European Union, where 'governance' is defined by the Commission 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 2001b, 8 n1).

Gender mainstreaming, is en vogue in political science and particularly 'new institutionalist' feminist scholarship. A number of studies are now available that assess the strategy in principle and practice. The present one, to my knowledge, is 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" (Trondal 2001). 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" (Stevens 2001, 112). 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 (Shaw 2001). This paper also aims at

clarifying the conceptual links between the set of strategies termed 'gender mainstreaming' and organizational change.

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 (Mazey 2000). 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 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 employment (Mazey 2001, 19). 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 (1998, Ch.3) delineates three categories of strategies, and the bulk of the literature follows this taxonomy.

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 (Mazey 2001, 21-6).

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 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 (1986). The report particularly pointed at the prevalence of sexual stereotyping (Stevens 2001, 112). 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 Bejing 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" (European Commission 1996). 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 "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*. The Commission has also clarified that gender mainstreaming is a supplement to, not a replacement of existing strategies (European Commission 1998b, 21). 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 (e.g. Page 1997, Hooghe 1999) Liesbet Hooghe (2001, 6) 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. 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) (January 2002, European Commission 2002a).

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 original employer, mostly national administrations (Stevens 2001, Ch.1). 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 (Shore 2000, 189). 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 (1997) had found numbers up to 82% among A1 officials (66% for A2) in the early nineties, Hooghe in the late 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" (Hooghe 2001, 60, Table 2.8). 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." (Page 1997, 82). 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. (Page 1997, 50). A further commitment to meritocracy following the recent scandals in the Santer Commission (1999) and the subsequently increased scrutiny, are likely to further strengthen these review processes.[3] Since September 1999, only 6 (out of 31) appointments to A1 posts were made of external candidates. Of those 31, 19 were promotions (European Commission 2002b).

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 (Stevens 2001, 97). 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. (Stevens 2001, 98)

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 (2001) 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. 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.

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%) (European Commission 2002a).

2.3 Gender Mainstreaming and Organizational Culture
In the following, 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

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[3] 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 2002).

organization. Anne Havnør (2000) shows how particularly the 1995 enlargement brought in commissioners from Sweden and Finland who were highly committed to gender equality. 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 (2000) have convincingly used social movement theory to explain the adoption of gender mainstreaming in terms of political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and strategic issue framing. 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* 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" (European Commission 1997). Still, "there is wide-spread ignorance of and misunderstanding about the concept of gender mainstreaming among policy-makers within the EU and the member states" (Mazey 2001, 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" (Mazey 2000, 341). 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" (2000, 390-1). Ana-Paula Laissy, 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 (1999, 40).

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 (2001) similarly describes the differential treatment of women and men in the promotion process. 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 (Acker 1990). This critique of 'neutral' organizations is mirrored in feminist critiques of

the 'gender-neutral' liberal state and citizenship (e.g. Phillips 1995). 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" (Kanter [1977] quoted in Acker 1990, 143). 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 (Lind and Ward 2001).

These cultural constraints are continually constructed and reproduced as "webs of meaning […] through the everyday practices of actors" (Ramsay and Parker 1992, 258). "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" (Witz and Savage 1992, 40). They "must behave like men, but cannot *be* men" (53). 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" (Acker 1990, 146-7). 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 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 (2001, 86; 102-3; 114). 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 (Moore 1992).

The relevance of informal rules can also be demonstrated from a second perspective by looking at the actors' preferences within the institution. Hooghe

concludes from her interviews with senior civil servants that in this regard "utility maximization predominates. […] When preferences bear directly on issues of professional survival or success, internalized beliefs give way to utility concerns" (2001, 213). 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 (North 1990). 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" (quoted in Stevens 2001, 114). 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. I 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).

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. *Not expected to produce 'sudden' change*
Informal rules (organizational culture)	③ Gender Mainstreaming (II) (e.g. awareness, training, etc.)	Gradually increased awareness *Not expected to produce 'sudden' change*

Gender mainstreaming, by taking into account the differential situation of women and men, is directly geared toward transforming a male dominated organizational culture.[4] Through a number of 'soft' practices, the strategy offers

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[4] 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 1998, 16). It aims to achieve this "gender-sensitive

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 (Stevens 2001, 111). 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 (Mazey 2001, 38).

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). As decision-makers on all levels, in all areas are forced to take gender into consideration, 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 male" (2000). 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" (Mazey 2001, 7). And instead of helping women to adjust, 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 as a socially constructed category and allows for 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..

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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 2000b, 18).

3 Measuring Success

3.1 The Number of Women in Decision-Making Positions Over Time[5]

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'.[6] The next level, A3, makes up 10% of the total A grade employment (March 2000, European Database 2000).

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 changes and significant changes in the direction of the development of the representation of women are very unlikely due to societal changes, which are typically gradual (e.g. North 1990). Rather, those can be attributed to internal, organizational changes.

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 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 governments (Gidengil and Vengroff 1997) and European universities (Zimmer et al. 2000).

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[5] For sources to the data presented here, see Appendix C.
[6] Hooghe (2001) and Stevens (2001) similarly distinguish these "senior management" positions from the other A grade levels.

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 (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. 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 faired in the different DGs of the Commission.

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. 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 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. A few qualitative reports on the implementation of gender mainstreaming will therefore be evaluated.

Ana-Paula Laissy, head of the Commission's Equal Opportunities Unit has found that with the 3^{d} 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 (1999, 39-40). 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" (European Commission 2001d, 2001e). Furthermore, recruitment and promotion targets have been set for senior officials (European Commission 1999, 87). 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 (2000, 439). They highlight that gender mainstreaming in the EU has not been radical, but 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 (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000, 441).

The development in two DGs, Research and Competition, will be examined here. In terms of their dominant frame, both have traditionally not been favourable grounds to issues of gender equality: DG Research has traditionally emphasised technical efficiency and excellence, while DG Competition operates under a decisively neo-liberal frame (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000). 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" (447). The DG's large autonomy within the Commission has allowed it to refuse the 'soft policy' recommendations made by the Equal Opportunities Unit and not reported any mainstreaming or positive action consideration for both 2001 and 2002 (European Commission 2001d, 2001e). On the other hand, 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% since 1999, 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 as Commissioner for Research directed and groups of women scientists lobbied the DG to adopt a more gender sensitive approach (2000, 447-50). 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" (European Commission 2001c, 18). 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 between 1999 and 2001, as the number of women A-level officials rose from 10.5% to 15.5%.

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. 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.

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 (Stevens 2001, Ch.4). 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 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 (Shore 2000, 184, Table 1). Furthermore, four out of five of these senior civil servants who returned a questionnaire to Liesbet Hooghe (2002) 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 (2001, 55). 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 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 in the permanent representations of the member countries at the EU level and comes to the result that they are quite similar (1997, 70-1). 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" (2001, 37). 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 qualitative data from interviews with Commission

officials 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, disaggregated numerical data would be helpful in assessing the effect that mainstreaming has had. Secondly, since the transformation of an organization's cultural characteristics takes time almost by definition, simply more time is needed to determine how sustained the increase observed here will be.

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. 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 (European Commission 2001a).

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 proposes that a critical mass of 30% will be necessary to result in any substantial transformation of the policy process (2001, 41). 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 (European Commission 2000b)

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 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" (2000, 450-1). 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" (2001, 51).

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 administrations. Annette Zimmer and her collaborators (2000, 101) 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. Gidengil and Vengroff (1997) similarly find no correlation between the introduction of affirmative action programs and the number of women in senior positions.

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. 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. 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 organizations[7], as well as the role that men engaged in feminist activities, such as the Finnish Commissioner Liikanen, play in promoting gender democratic policies.

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[7] For a review of this literature see Keiser et al. (2002).

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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.

Appendix B

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)			6 (B, D, F, I, L, NL)	0 (0%)	Equal Treatment Policies
	1975 – 1st directive		9 (1973 + DK, IRL, UK)		
	1976 – 2nd directive				
	1978 – 3rd directive		10 (1981 + EL)		
	1982 – 1985 1st Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities	1984 "Joint Committee on Equal Opportunities" (Report 1985)			Positive Action Policies
	1986 – 1990 2nd Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities	1988 – 1990 1st Action Programme	12 (1986 + ES, P)	2 (11.8%) (1989)	
1993 Treaty of Maastricht (Powers of the EP)	1991 – 1995 3rd Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities	1991 EO-Unit		1 (5.9%) (1993-94)	
		1992 – 1996 2nd Action Programme	15 (1995 + A, FIN, S)	5 (25 %) (1995) 'Equality Group'	
1997 Treaty of Amsterdam (Art. 2, 3, 13)	1996 – 2000 4th Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities	1997 – 2000 3rd Action Programme			Gender Mainstreaming
	2001 – 2005 Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality	Directorate General specific Action Plans			

Sources: Stevens (2001); Mazey (2001); various EU publications.

Appendix C

Women in Positions of Decision-Making in the Administration of the European Commission
% women 1977 – 2002 by staff grade
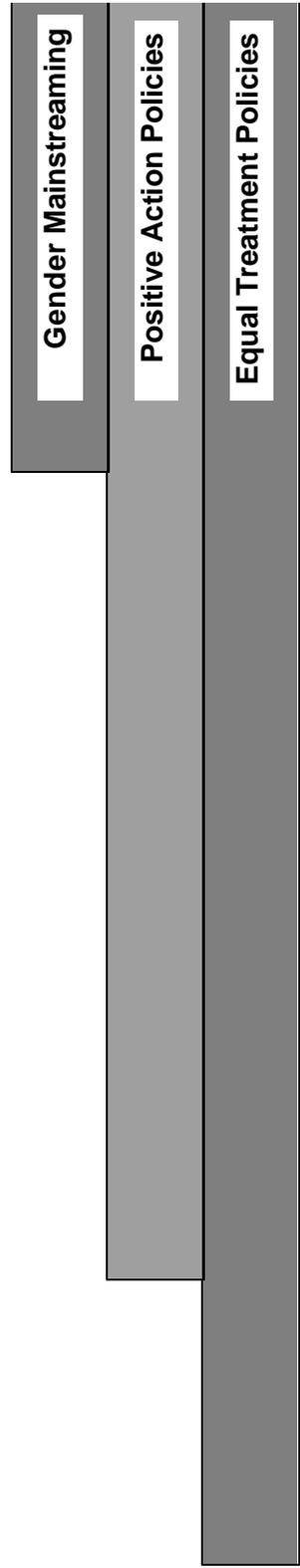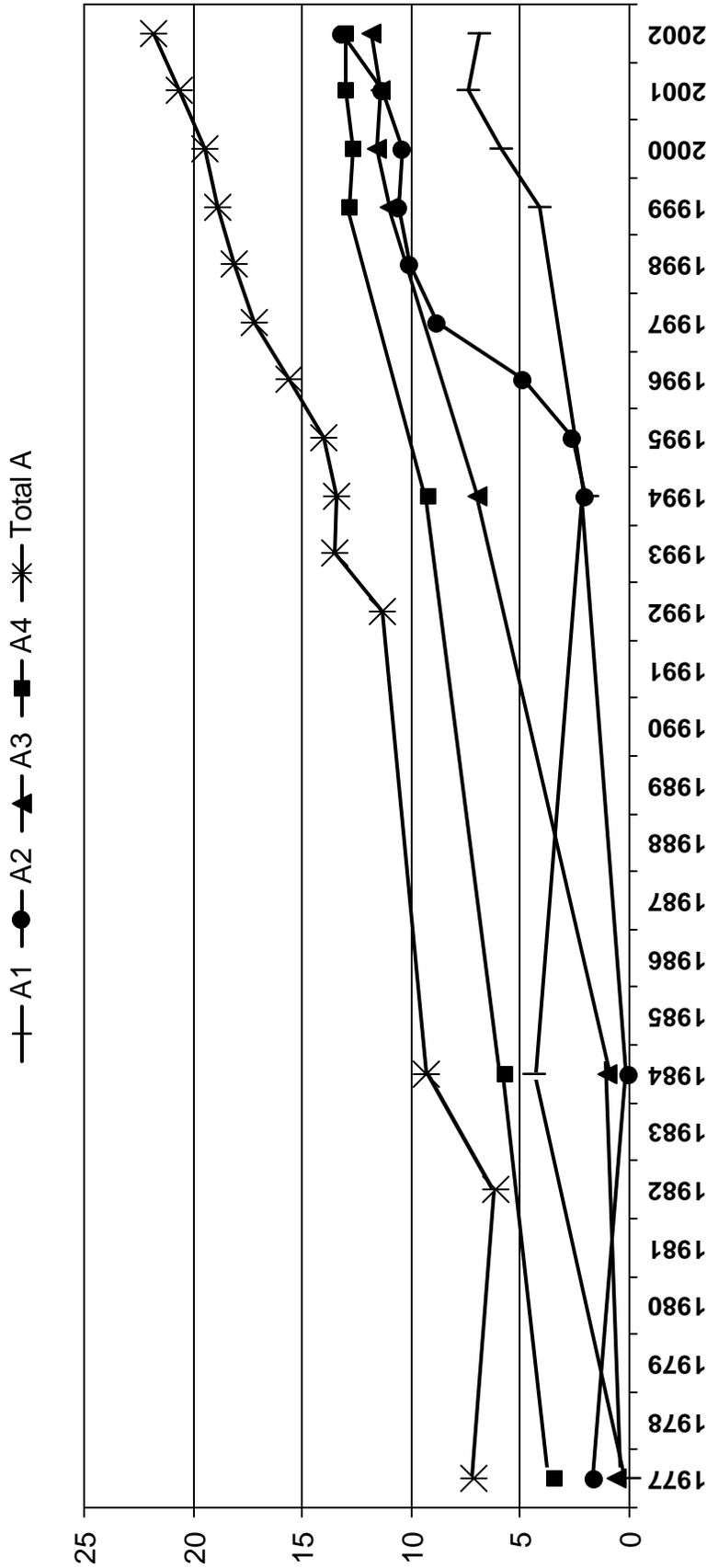
Sources: "1977" Schmitt von Sydow (1980); "1982, 1992, 1993" Spence (1994); "1984" Stevens (2001); all others DG Admin (2002).