This article analyses how differences in domestic institutional constellations shape the representational roles of member state officials when attending the EU Council of Ministers. The conceptual framework used draws on theories of political representation, institutional theories and the Europeanisation literature. Our primary argument is that role perceptions are considerably conditioned by actors’ domestic institutional embeddedness. Comparing Belgian and Swedish officials attending working groups within the Council of Ministers substantiates this argument. Belgian officials are more supranationally oriented than their Swedish counterparts. This difference is related to varying levels of vertical and horizontal specialisation, federalism, competition among veto-players, the role of the Foreign Ministry, and the level of trust in domestic government compared to the level of trust in the EU.

Contemporary studies under the heading of ‘Europeanisation’ are concerned with how EU institutions and politics affect member states’ institutions and policies. These studies take domestic adaptation – in the form of institutional, procedural or policy change – as the dependent variable and use European pressure as an independent variable. The main question is ‘how Europe hits home’ or the transformation of ‘the domestic institutions of the Member States’ (Anderson 2002; Börzel 1999; Goetz 2000; Green Cowles et al. 2001; Hanf and Soetendorp 1998; Harmsen 1999; Kassim et al. 2000; Knill 2001; Ladrech 1994; Olsen 2003). This literature concludes that we are not witnessing a fundamental change in the member states’ administrative structures and styles, legal rules, cultures and collective identities. Most studies suggest that the ‘effects’ of the EU are considerably mediated through, and conditioned by, existing domestic institutions, policies, cultures and identities.

This ‘top-down’ approach has generated quite robust knowledge about the persistence of domestic institutions. However, this approach to Europeanisation has its limits, as it does not adequately explain why member states and their representatives behave differently at the European level. In general, the
Europeanisation literature has been skewed towards perceiving member states as recipients of EU policies, institutions and norms (see Kassim et al. 2000). This article shifts focus by analysing how domestic institutions feed into the EU institutions through domestic officials attending EU institutions. We change from a ‘top-down’ approach towards a ‘bottom-up’ approach and ask how nation states’ representatives ‘hit’ Europe. We address the following question: How do domestic institutional structures shape the role perceptions of domestic ‘Eurocrats’? More precisely, we analyse those domestic institutions that foster the adoption of supranational role perceptions among officials attending the Council Working Parties (CWP).

Many EU policies are set at the bureaucratic stage in the Council of Ministers. It is thus important to identify the roles these bureaucrats play. By role perceptions we mean those norms, rules, expectations and prescriptions of appropriate behaviour perceived by those carrying out representational tasks. Roles are causally important because they provide generalised recipes and frames for action. Two role conceptions, a supranationalist one and an intergovernmentalist one, can be distinguished and investigated in the context of the Council of Ministers. Those with an intergovernmental role conception conceive European policy-making as an act of exchanging and balancing member state interests. Officials adopting this role see themselves as national representatives and confine their task to defending national positions. Those with a supranational role conception view Europe as an autonomous level primarily designed for finding policy solutions in the interest of a common European good. This role implies a desire to promote the project of European collective policy-making. The adoption of a supranational role perception does not necessarily contradict intergovernmental conceptions or the mere shift of one category to another; it might also imply a re-working of intergovernmental conceptions. For instance, officials continue to define themselves as national representatives while at the same time they increasingly consider national interests as overlapping with a common European interest. In operational terms, a supranational role denotes identifying with EU institutions, interests and policy positions while an intergovernmental role means identifying with national institutions, interests and policy positions. Thus, a supranational official identifies with the EU committees attended or with the EU as a whole and is EU-minded and loyal to EU policies and politics.

One motivation for writing this article was the puzzling – maybe contradictory – empirical observations made in past research (Beyers 2002; Dierickx and Beyers 1999; Trondal 2002). Beyers, for instance, observed a substantial correlation between trust in domestic policy co-ordination – organisational self-esteem – and the adoption of supranational role perceptions among domestic Belgian ‘Eurocrats’. For three Scandinavian countries –
Sweden, Norway and Denmark – Trondal demonstrated that the relation between domestic co-ordination and supranational roles is less straightforward. To build theoretical bridges between these contradictory observations, this article suggests an analytical framework that explains ‘supranationalism’ beyond mere methodological artefacts. Theorising the effects of domestic institutions on the adoption of supranational role perceptions among domestic EU decision-makers is largely missing in the literature. Based on this lack of research on the bottom-up approach to Europeanisation, and guided by the principle of analytic parsimony, EU-level variables are left out of this analysis as explanatory proxies for supranationalism.

The Europeanisation literature has been particularly focused on how EU institutions affect domestic adaptation in various ways. Institutionalist scholars, for instance, have argued that the EU institutional infrastructure fosters new patterns of co-operation and conflict that cut across territorial cleavages (Egeberg 2001). Rationalists have claimed that supranational institutions help to guarantee credible commitments among the member states (Moravcsik 1999; Pollack 1997).

One remaining and pertinent issue is how member states control EU institutional and policy dynamics. Liberal intergovernmentalists (LIG), neo-functionals (NF) and multi-level governance perspectives (MLG) disagree on this (Börzel 1999: 574). LIG approaches argue that member state executives ultimately control European politics. NF scholars claim that European integration creates new opportunity structures at the EU level. Various domestic actors such as sub-national authorities and interest groups increasingly bypass national executives. Finally, proponents of MLG argue that European integration increases mutual dependencies among all actors and that this leads to more co-operative forms of governance. LIG, NF and MLG approaches expect a ‘reduction of variance and disparities in administrative arrangements’ towards strengthening (LIG), weakening (NF) or transforming (MLG) nation state institutions (Börzel 1999; Olsen 2003: 506–7).

However, neither of these approaches renders intelligible how domestic institutions affect the way domestic officials conceive their role in EU-level decision-making processes. For instance, Pollack suggests that member state ‘control efficacy and credibility varies from issue-area to issue-area, over time’, and from ‘agent to agent’, but he does not systematically capture the potential impact of varying domestic institutional configurations (Pollack 1997: 110, 123–4). The same goes for the LIG approach, which explains policy outcomes at the EU level primarily by the distribution of power and preferences among domestic executives (Green Cowles et al. 2001: 162; Moravscik 1999; Wallace 1999: 155–9).

This study should not be read as a rejection of the LIG, NF or the MLG approaches; rather it should be regarded as a supplement to them. We contend
that there does not exist one single grand theory encompassing all aspects of European governance; neither do we need one. We think that it is crucial to develop a sound theoretical, methodological and empirical dialogue, and our efforts should be evaluated in this light (Jupille et al. 2003). Our approach builds on a positivist assumption that it is possible to generate knowledge by outlining operational and competing hypotheses based on substantive middle-range theories. In this regard, this article can be situated in an emerging research agenda fostering bridge building between empirically oriented middle-range social constructivist and rationalist approaches. Thus, we outline eight operational hypotheses on the adoption of supranational roles among civil servants. For this we draw on middle-range theories of political representation, institutional theories and the Europeanisation literature.

These hypotheses are substantiated by selected empirical observations from Belgium and Sweden. For illuminating the validity of the hypotheses we draw on a rich body of empirical data on EU committee participants. As a starting point, we use interview and survey data on Belgian and Swedish officials attending CWPs. These data – both qualitative and quantitative – include samples of Swedish and Belgian bureaucrats employed in domestic ministries, agencies and at the Permanent Representations in Brussels. Second, in order to arrive at an in-depth comparison of both countries, we review existing empirical studies on the European adaptation of Belgium and Sweden. Our main argument is that the roles of member state representatives are the result of domestic institutional configurations (Hammond 1996: 128–9). For the sake of brevity, this article is primarily focused on the role of domestic institutions at the decision-making stage in the EU system and, more particularly, the representation of member state bureaucrats in the CWPs.

Our argument is organised as follows. The next section defines member state officials as ‘representatives’ by introducing two models of representation, the imperative model and the liberal model. The following section introduces the concept of representational ambiguity. The concept of representational ambiguity implies that domestic institutional contingencies may foster the emergence of supranational role perceptions. Next, we explicate eight domestic conditions under which officials are likely to adopt a supranational role perception. These conditions are: (1) vertically specialised structures of domestic civil services; (2) horizontally specialised domestic civil services; (3) federal polities; (4) a large number of domestic veto players; (5) competing domestic veto points; (6) a large number of domestic actors involved in policy co-ordination; (7) a weak co-ordinating power of the domestic Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and (8) distrust in the domestic polity accompanied by high trust in the EU polity. We then show how these conditions play out empirically in two EU member states, Belgium and Sweden.
TWO MODELS OF REPRESENTATION

Representation refers to a method through which policy inputs are transformed into policy outputs. It is indirect in the sense that one actor acts on behalf of others. It encompasses the gathering and exchange of information, the elaboration of alternative ideas and the assessment of external consequences for broader societal segments. In democratic polities representation is also the process through which some actors get elected (e.g. parliamentarians) or appointed (e.g. bureaucrats) in order to realise more or less precisely defined goals. But representation should not be restricted to the mere procedural aspect of elections or appointments. More broadly, it implies that representatives embody something – a constituency, an interest, an idea, specialised knowledge, a demographic characteristic, an identity – that has to be made present. Representation thus means the paradox of ‘making present in some sense ... something which is nevertheless not present literally or in fact’ (Pitkin 1972: 8–9). Successful representation happens if those representing make present what is not yet present.

Representation can be studied from two perspectives. First, it is formalistic when based on formal authorisation of someone to act on behalf of others, as for example in parliamentary elections or in formal appointments of civil servants. Second, representation can be seen as symbolic or as something that is embodied in behavioural norms and habits considered appropriate. Successful representation in the symbolic sense ‘exists in the minds of the civil servants’ (Saalfeld and Müller 1997: 9). This article emphasises the symbolic side of representation. Before dealing with the conditional emergence of supranational roles, two models of symbolic representation can be distinguished (Trondal and Veggeland 2003; Wahlke et al. 1962).

The imperative model stresses that actors act under clear guidance of instructions defined by political superiors. In the case of the EU, this means that domestic officials in CWPs act on the basis of instructions defined at the national level. Individual autonomy and discretion are restricted. Officials are supposed to act loyally towards their political leaders. This model implies that bureaucrats act as government representatives under the leadership of domestic politicians and that other actors – such as mobilised societal interests, European institutions, the mass media – do not directly influence them.

The contrast to the imperative model is the liberal model of representation. Here, the autonomy of the bureaucrat is extensive, almost infinite; s/he acts as independent expert and her/his interventions are assumed to be unbiased by mobilised interests or political woes. In this model true representation is considered to emerge only when the representative has the leeway to adopt role perceptions which may deviate from the ‘government representative’ role (Trondal and Veggeland 2003). This discretion includes the possibility of
paying attention to external actors such as interest groups, European institutions and the mass media. The liberty to act entails the capacity to decide on the basis of ‘unbiased opinion, mature judgement, and enlightened conscience’ (Burke quoted by Wahlke et al. 1962: 270). The liberal model reflects optimism as far as analytic rationality and scientific judgement are concerned. Importantly, this model stresses that ‘weak links may exist between representatives and those they represent’, read ‘national governments’ (Trondal and Veggeland 2003).

The imperative and liberal models of representation entail different trade-offs between expertise-based decision-making, neutrality and political loyalty. According to the imperative model, domestic officials are both neutral and loyal representatives of elected politicians and thereby domestically accountable. A bureaucrat is a delegate instructed by politicians and, concomitantly, s/he does not interfere in political conflicts or grant access to societal actors who may mobilise specific constituencies. Political conflicts are solved and settled by politicians, not by bureaucrats. Therefore, the vertical relations between bureaucrats and politicians are organised to maximise the procedural control of politicians over bureaucrats. As politicians instruct bureaucrats, the linkages between elected and non-elected decision-makers are extensive and well elaborated, while bureaucratic networks criss-crossing ministries, agencies and interest groups are less well developed.

In the liberal model of representation, bureaucrats play the role of independent expert. They act relatively autonomously and disregard ‘politics’. According to the liberal model politicians have less outspoken preferences regarding the precise nature of policy outcomes. They have a high diffuse trust in bureaucrats and demand that decision-making reflect objective and complete information about policy outcomes and policy consequences. Direct political control is less developed and less consequential, whereas (interdepartmental) networks among expert bureaucrats, parliamentarians and sector interest groups are dense. Since expertise and scientific knowledge are basic ingredients in public policy-making, the civil servants grant access to those societal actors that are able to improve the expertise of the civil service. In sum, the liberal model pictures civil servants as trustees who take into account the knowledge and interests made available from external actors when making decisions. In day-to-day decision-making, such as Council working parties, they are able and tend to bypass the domestic political leadership.

AMBIGUOUS REPRESENTATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The liberal and imperative models build on a dichotomous conception of politics and administration. In the imperative model, the role of civil servants
is that of the subservient bureaucrat guided by his political masters, but staying disconnected from the world of politics. In the liberal model, the bureaucrat acts independently from his political masters. His role is that of the analytic bureaucrat. However, in contemporary political systems the distinction between politics and administration is seldom neatly circumscribed. Organisations and decision-making entail several ambiguities (March and Olsen 1979; Olsen 1988). In this section we outline a model of representational ambiguity by drawing on insights from representation in the Council of Ministers. First, we take a brief look at the Council infrastructure. Then, we introduce the concept of ambiguous representation where actors are embedded in multiple institutional settings accompanying multiple roles and potential role conflicts.

Policy-making in the Council of Ministers is often portrayed as sequenced in three stages (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 1997). First, Council committees specialise in obtaining information about particular policies and try to settle a first compromise. Then the Committee of Permanent Representation or COREPER (I, II or SCA) further refines the Commission proposal and reports to the ministers (in A or B points). Finally, the Council of Ministers decides. This sequential model portrays the Council as a Euro-level game sliced into bureaucratic (the CWP and COREPER) and political levels (the Ministers). The latter ultimately decides over the former. This depiction of the Council of Ministers fits into a dichotomous conception of bureaucracy and politics as outlined above.

The imperative model of representation supports this sequential model by envisaging the role of bureaucrats as that of carrying out instructions from the domestic political leadership. Bureaucrats see themselves as representatives of the domestic government from which they receive instructions. The ministerial level rubber-stamps decisions bureaucrats have made on the basis of political instructions established beforehand. EU policy-making is seen as an act of aggregating and balancing member state interests and not as an act of reaching a common European good. Bureaucrats are not autonomous from domestic politics; they are controlled by the instructions received from the domestic political leadership.

On the other hand, the liberal model of representation pictures the Council as less sequential and hierarchically nested, and more sectorally interconnected and hierarchically de-coupled. As politicians delegate policy-making responsibilities to bureaucrats they may easily lose control over the bureaucrats. National ministers are seen as rubber-stamping decisions made more or less autonomously by bureaucrats. Bureaucrats do not consider themselves as representatives of domestic governments or as being instructed and controlled by the domestic political leadership. Weak control by domestic principals makes it easier for them to conceive their role as
independent policy-makers, to see the EU as an autonomous policy level at which policy solutions should relate to a common European good.

Neither the imperative nor the liberal models of representation explicate the conditions under which different representational roles emerge among member state representatives. Instead of drawing a clear-cut line between what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate, successful and unsuccessful forms or representation, as the liberal and imperative models do, we propose a model of ambiguous representation. The basic idea is that the content of representation, e.g. adopting a supranational or an intergovernmental role, is not always given beforehand. Given the varying domestic institutional settings in which bureaucrats operate it is likely that their representational roles vary accordingly.

The model of ambiguous representation starts from the assumption that actors operate under the condition of bounded rationality, i.e. their computational abilities are limited and their access to information is restricted (Hammond 1996: 118–19). Especially, the embeddedness of actors in multiple institutional settings constrains their information processing capacities. Bureaucrats are faced with dual allegiances; they are national officials working part-time at the European level. This implies dilemmas regarding what authority actors actually possess, whose interests are represented and how conflicting views are reconciled. The practice of representation thus becomes uncertain. Bureaucrats are expected to represent their member state, to take care of the functional domain to which they belong, and to consider the views expressed by other member state representatives. Representation in the EU indeed becomes a ‘balancing act’ (Lequesne 2000). Under such conditions actors tend to activate role perceptions that enable them to prioritise particular aspects of policy problems (and de-emphasise others) or being responsive to some problems (and remain less sensitive to others). Under these ambiguities actors may either fall back on familiar and traditional roles or, under certain conditions, search for new roles. Because political superiors, i.e. domestic politicians, are not directly involved in EU committees, information asymmetries may emerge between them and the participating officials. In this situation it is difficult for politicians to elaborate detailed instructions and, therefore, the bureaucrat has leeway to act with some degree of autonomy and adopt supranational role perceptions.

In the following section we explicate domestic politico-administrative institutional contingencies that trigger supranational roles among civil servants. Eight hypotheses are suggested that explicate domestic conditions under which bureaucrats are likely to activate supranational role perceptions. We organise the discussion under three headings: (1) vertical and horizontal specialisation; (2) veto-players; and (3) policy co-ordination and trust in domestic and European institutions.
Vertical and Horizontal Specialisation

The first set of hypotheses concerns the immediate institutional environment surrounding the individual bureaucrat. Role perceptions are likely to be moulded by those institutions that are primary and immediate to the officials (Egeberg 2001). The primary structure in which a bureaucrat is embedded includes those formal and informal structures that organise the attention of bureaucrats in daily practice. We suggest two organisational dimensions that are relevant at the politico-administrative level: the degree of horizontal specialisation and the degree of vertical specialisation.

Government institutions may be horizontally specialised or non-specialised. A collegial form of governments is an example of a non-specialised structure (e.g. the German Kollegialprinzip), while a ministerial form of government stressing ministerial autonomy exemplifies a specialised structure (e.g. the German Ressortprinzip). Second, we consider the vertical specialisation of domestic bureaucracies. A vertically specialised structure is characterised by a clear-cut barrier between political control and professional autonomy. In vertically de-specialised structures, by contrast, political signals and preferences are transported all the way from the political leadership to the lower echelons of the administration (and vice versa).

The first hypothesis is that representational roles are related to the bureaucrat’s vertical organisational location.

\[ H1: \text{Bureaucrats used to vertically specialised organisational structures are more likely to adopt a supranational role than those used to vertically non-specialised structures.} \]

A vertically non-specialised structure strengthens the potential for vertical control and steering of the bureaucrat, thereby reducing the likelihood that the latter activates supranational roles. Under conditions of strong political control, the bureaucrat is less likely to act autonomously in the CWPs. In contrast, a vertically specialised model of organisation grants more leeway to the bureaucrat. This structure enhances the possibility that the bureaucrat does not act under strict control by and guidance from political superiors. Political control of the committee participants is likely to be post hoc, not ex post, for instance when the dossier has reached the ministerial level in the Council (or the implementation stage).

With respect to horizontal specialisation, domestic administrative systems are to a varying degree organised according to the principle of purpose/sector and territory (Gulick 1937). This leads to our second hypothesis:
**H2**: Bureaucrats from sectoral ministries are more likely to adopt a supranational role than are diplomats from the Foreign Office and the Permanent Representation.

Bureaucrats attached to the Foreign Office (FO) in the capitals and diplomats at the Permanent Representations (PR) in Brussels are more used to thinking in territorial terms as they represent their country (territory) and not a specific policy sector. The Council infrastructure is largely compatible with the territorial principle of organisation that these officials are used to. As these officials become primarily involved in Council decision-making during the later stages of COREPER deliberations, they are – compared to bureaucrats at the lower echelons of working groups – likely to consider issues in terms of ‘national interests’. The working group level is organised more according to the principle of purpose/sector, i.e. bureaucrats from similar sectors meet each other in the same working groups. In this sense, bureaucrats from sectoral ministries are more likely to transcend territorially intergovernmental thinking and adopt supranational role perceptions.

With respect to vertical specialisation, domestic political systems are to a varying degree organised according to a federal and a unitary principle. The third hypothesis reads as follows:

**H3**: Bureaucrats from federal polities are more likely to adopt a supranational role than those coming from unitary polities.

A unitary state reflects only marginally the territorial composition of its sub-territories. An administrative organisation specialised according to function or process is more prevalent for such states. By contrast, in a federal state, sub-territories are strongly mobilised (Burgess 2002; Egeberg 2004). Consequently, federal bureaucrats that become involved in EU-level processes have to consider more explicitly sub-territorial considerations than civil servants from unitary states.

Bureaucrats from unitary states are used to apply non-territorial or functional roles while bureaucrats from federal states are more accustomed to think in territorial terms. For this reason, experiences with the Council of Ministers pose different challenges for bureaucrats originating from different state traditions. Taking into account that the Council is mainly organised according to a territorial principle, bureaucrats from unitary states – compared to bureaucrats from federal states – are more challenged by the organisational principles of the CWPs (Egeberg and Trondal 1999: 133–42). The territorial structure of the Council stimulates bureaucrats from unitary states to start re-thinking in terms of ‘national’ positions and roles (instead of the functional representation they are accustomed to). Although bureaucrats
from federal polities are used to adopting territorial roles, they have a less unitary conception of sovereignty. European federal polities are characterised by sophisticated and complex institutional mechanisms that help to accommodate territorial lines of conflict. For this reason, bureaucrats from federal polities are less likely to consider territorial conflicts as zero-sum games and more used to sharing sovereignty across territorial levels (Hooghe and Marks 2001: 151). Federal bureaucrats are less challenged by the intergovernmental dynamics in the Council than are officials from unitary states. Consequently, they more easily de-couple from their domestic territorial affiliation and adopt supranational role perceptions.

**Veto Players**

Veto players are interdependent actors whose agreement is necessary for reaching a stable policy outcome. The more veto players in a politico-administrative system, the more difficult it is to adopt a central co-ordinated national position on the EU reflecting the preferences of each veto player. Therefore, bureaucratic autonomy and discretion are potentially large in systems with many veto players and especially when the different players represent conflicting preferences (Hammond 1996: 143; Tsebelis and Yataganas 2002). Accordingly, as domestic political elites are less capable of forming detailed instructions that fall within the feasible win-set, national bureaucrats receive few detailed instructions from the domestic political leadership and have more discretion at the EU level to develop supranational roles.

This leads to our fourth hypothesis:

\[H4: \text{The larger the numbers of veto players, the more bureaucrats adopt a supranational role.}\]

It is not only the number of veto players that relates to supranationalism. We also argue that the competitive relations between veto-players matter:

\[H5: \text{The more competitive the relations between veto players, the more domestic bureaucrats adopt a supranational role.}\]

In the literature, federalism is usually equated with multiple veto players. Although a federal structure often entails many veto players, the concept of veto players is a more generic feature of organisations. The extent to which different jurisdictions are competing for policy competencies is important. In the context of federal systems, Börzel (1999) has distinguished between competitive regionalism and co-operative federalism. In competitive regionalism sub-national units are striving to increase their
political competencies and seek to preserve their political prerogatives vis-à-vis the federal level. Under co-operative federalism sub-national units prefer to co-operate with the federal level and not compete for political competencies. In competitive situations much political energy is directed towards conflicts regarding the domestic re-distribution of powers and less energy is spent on external challenges. As a result, political mandating tends to be less detailed and comprehensive. The Council of Ministers poses a challenge for such systems as it expects domestic civil servants to present a single national view.

The number of veto players and especially their competitive relations may condition the likelihood that domestic civil servants adopt new supranational roles. When there are few veto players and a co-operative atmosphere exists, bureaucrats are less likely to deviate from, or resist, policy instructions. This is different under the condition of many different veto players embodying conflicting preferences. Under such conditions actors can more easily bypass or ignore central co-ordination devices, can try to become players in their own right at the EU level or can use central co-ordination mechanisms as tools to defend sub-national interests instead of creating a common national position. As there are many veto players, bureaucrats have many alternative opportunities or access points to realise their goals. Bureaucrats may move to other domestic (or European) actors or networks, and they may mobilise alternative coalitions (both at the domestic and the EU levels) to realise desired ends.

This discretion also implies that it is relatively easy to ignore actors and interests. It means that the bureaucrat has more leeway in the development of his or her own ‘instructions’. Accordingly, the distinction between instruction giver and instruction taker becomes less clear-cut. Because a rich and competitive veto system is less able to create policy guidelines in short timespans, domestic instructions tend to be less well conceived. In creating their own instructions, bureaucrats may seek ‘inspiration’ elsewhere. They may tend to use the committee structure at the EU level not for defending pre-established national policy guidelines, but for seeking common European solutions for problems to which they have no ‘national’ answer.

**Policy Co-ordination and Trust in Domestic and European Institutions**

Co-ordination is often seen as positive and valuable in itself. It suggests efficiency, fewer conflicts, rationality and co-operation. However, one may equally argue that there is more pressure to co-ordinate because there is an overall level of distrust in government (Kassim *et al*. 2000: 1–2). In order to present a single national position, fragmentation and incoherence have to be overcome. We suggest three hypotheses on policy co-ordination and trust.
H6: The greater number of actors involved in domestic co-ordination, the more ambiguous the instructions, and the more likely that a supranational role is adopted.

This argument runs parallel to the concept of veto players. Arguably, the greater the number of actors involved in co-ordination the more likely it accompanies multiple, imperfect and ambiguous instructions. We argue that the sheer number of actors and institutions involved in co-ordination multiplies the number of problems, solutions and world views put on the table. On the contrary, ‘[h]ierarchy refers to the dominance of the single bureaucracy or single actor in the deliberation and handling of regulations; in a co-ordinated mode of action bureaucrats share power with other groups and institutions’ (Page 2001: 141). Thus, the greater the number of actors involved in domestic co-ordination, the more diverse, ambiguous and conflicting instructions are likely to result. Ambiguous instructions are conducive to actors evoking roles that deviate from the national role. The lack of one hierarchically supreme domestic co-ordinating institution thus increases the likelihood that civil servants lose sight of the nation state as the central locus of loyalty.

Moreover, supranationalism may also be related to which ministry is in charge of domestic co-ordination of EU dossiers:

H7: The less domestic co-ordination is steered by the Foreign Office, the more likely that a supranational role is adopted.

As suggested, cross-sectoral ministries like the FO with a territorial integrating function reduce the actors’ leeway to act independently (see H2). If the FO dominates domestic co-ordination, civil servants are likely to activate government representative roles. Note, however, that this hypothesis is conditioned by the fact that no other external actors co-ordinate together with the FO and that the number of actors involved in domestic co-ordination remains limited (see H6).

Finally, overall trust in domestic and EU institutions is important for understanding the role perceptions adopted by civil servants. Trust concerns the extent to which the relationship between the instructor and the instructed shows a mutual belief that the relation will not be used for purposes that may damage one of the parties (e.g. cheating or betrayal) (March and Olsen 1995: 58).

H8: The more the domestic political environment features distrust in the domestic polity and a high trust in the EU, the more likely that bureaucrats will adopt a supranational role.
Many veto players may necessitate extensive co-ordination mechanisms. Also, low levels of trust are likely to correlate with an elaborate co-ordination system. However, the number of veto players in itself does not always coincide with a low level of trust or extensive co-ordination mechanisms. If there are few veto players accompanied by an overall level of distrust in the EU and a high level of trust in domestic institutions, one may need extensive and elaborate screening mechanisms at the domestic level. In order to be able to participate in EU policy-making one needs to build domestic support for every issue on the agenda. When an actor does not trust the EU level, s/he is tempted to control it by investing heavily in policy preparation and co-ordination. For this reason, member states with fewer veto players but a high level of distrust towards the EU often have equally extensive co-ordination mechanisms as member states with high levels of trust in the EU and many domestic veto players. In contrast, when there is lot of trust in the EU there is less need for extensive and elaborate control or screening mechanisms targeted at bureaucrats (Kassim et al. 2000: 1–2). Trust situations make actors more likely to deliberate than to control, i.e. they start acting in an other-regarding way that maximises collective utilities (Eriksen and Fossum 2000; March and Olsen 1995: 169).

COMPARING BELGIAN AND SWEDISH CWP PARTICIPANTS

We now address the eight hypotheses empirically. To illuminate the validity of the hypotheses we draw on a rich body of empirical data on EU committee participants. As a starting point we use interview and survey data on Belgian and Swedish officials attending CWPs. These data include samples of Swedish and Belgian bureaucrats employed in domestic ministries, agencies and at the Permanent Representation in Brussels. Table 1 reports our empirical observations on Belgian and Swedish CWP participants regarding the adoption of supranational role or allegiance to Europe (operationalised according to our definition above), instructions and room for manoeuvre.

Our own research demonstrates that Swedish CWP participants perceive that they represent national interests and domestic constituencies (i.e. the Swedish political leadership and government). Considerably fewer Swedish officials adopt a supranational role orientation (see also Egeberg 1999; Egeberg et al. 2003; Trondal and Veggeland 2003). The Belgian case differs considerably from the Swedish case. Most Belgian bureaucrats believe that they should defend the national interest. However, about 70 per cent have supplemented this national role with a supranational one. There are considerable differences with respect to instructions in the Belgian and Swedish cases. Most Swedish CWP participants act according to written and unwritten instructions and indicate that the political-administrative leadership
governs them. In the Belgian case most bureaucrats say that they lack instructions, that they are often quite uncertain what viewpoint they should defend and that they enjoy considerable room for manoeuvre in the CWPs. Comparing both data sets, it appears that Swedish negotiators enjoy less freedom of manoeuvre in the CWPs. Put differently, Swedish bureaucrats attending the CWPs perceive their mandates as imperative while Belgian bureaucrats seem to work according to more liberal mandates. In the Swedish data, officials with a supranational orientation were mostly located at the PR in Brussels and among those who interact intensively with fellow colleagues from other countries. Again the Belgian data show considerable differences. Although not many differences were observed between sectoral ministries and the FO or the Brussels PR, it appeared that – in contrast to Sweden – bureaucrats of sectoral ministries more swiftly supplemented their national roles with supranational roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructions</th>
<th>Agencies, Sectoral Ministries</th>
<th>Permanent Representation, Foreign Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sweden</strong>: I have clear instructions as to what positions to pursue (percentage saying ‘always or very often’)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belgium</strong>: I always get very clear instructions from my ministry or my department as to what position I should take up (percentage saying ‘agree’ or ‘completely agree’)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Room for manoeuvre</th>
<th>Agencies, Sectoral Ministries</th>
<th>Permanent Representation, Foreign Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sweden</strong>: I have great amount of freedom when participating in Council working groups (percentage saying ‘always or very often’)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belgium</strong>: The mandate I receive does not leave me much room for manoeuvre (percentage saying ‘disagree’ or ‘completely disagree’)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allegiance to Europe</th>
<th>Agencies, Sectoral Ministries</th>
<th>Permanent Representation, Foreign Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sweden</strong>: Do you feel allegiance towards the European Union? (percentage saying ‘to a very large extent’ or ‘to a fairly large extent’)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belgium</strong>: Percentage favouring a strongly united Europe instead of maintaining the autonomy of the member-states</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Swedish N = 26
Belgian N = 65

Swedish N = 20
Belgian N = 30
The latter observation suggests that the distinction between sectoral bureaucrats and FO/PR bureaucrats does not fully explain the role orientations adopted by CWP participants (Hypothesis 2). As both countries represent different state systems, other institutional variables need further investigation (see below). In sum, it appears that Belgian supranationalism coincides with weak or under-specified instructions and that Swedish intergovernmentalism goes hand in hand with detailed instructions. The following sections explore in greater detail how our hypotheses contribute to explain these diverging observations. For this we rely on an in-depth review of existing empirical studies on the European adaptation in Belgium and Sweden.

**Vertical and Horizontal Specialisation**

Sweden is organised as a unitary state with delegated powers to local municipalities and counties. Despite strong local democracy in Sweden, the power of regional and local authorities is delegated from the state level. Power is ultimately vested in the parliament and delegated to sectoral ministries, agencies and state-owned companies at state level, as well as to regional and local authorities. The Swedish central administrative apparatus is organised into small ministries and many large semi-autonomous agencies organised beneath the ministry level. Civil servants at the agency level have strong formal autonomy from the political leadership. Horizontally, the government system is collegial; the ministers make decisions jointly. The system is therefore vertically integrated at the minister level and horizontally specialised according to sector and function at lower levels.

These observations are consistent with our Hypotheses 1 and 3. Parallel to Hooghe’s observations on top Commission officials, we observe that unitary and vertically integrated states produce more intergovernmental officials than do vertically specialised federal states (Hooghe 2001). Our finding that relatively few Swedish CWP participants adopt a supranational role may reflect the collegial and horizontally integrated system of government at the ministerial level. Horizontal departmentalisation along sectoral lines below the ministry level, however, is conducive to strengthening non-territorial roles among the civil servants who participate in CWP (Hypothesis 2). Bureaucrats who originate from unitary states and who are accustomed to functional autonomy tend to adopt intergovernmental role perceptions when attending the CWP. The semi-autonomous status of Swedish agencies and the intergovernmental role perceptions evoked by these officials fit into this picture.

Between 1985 and 1995, the Belgian state was reformed from a unitary state into a federal state with far-reaching autonomy for its constituent parts. Few Western democracies have been reformed so dramatically during the last
decades. During these state reforms, considerations regarding their effect on Belgian EU politics were not, or only partially and afterwards, taken into account (Bursens 2002a; Kerremans and Beyers 1998). Relations between sub-national units and the federal level are non-hierarchical. This implies, for example, that a federal law or regulation cannot overrule sub-national laws or regulations (in contrast to Germany’s ‘Bundesrecht bricht Landesrecht’). Within their field of competences sub-national units have exclusive and autonomous powers in legislation and policy execution. Many of these competencies of the sub-national units are linked to the EU (based on the principle in foro interno, in foro externo).

The strong vertical specialisation of the Belgian federal system makes political control less centralised and more fragmented than in the vertically integrated Swedish polity. This leads to weak and fragmented political instructions for federal civil servants. One of the most robust findings of our research is that Belgian representatives have few clear instructions and that they therefore face difficulties in figuring out which positions they should defend at the EU level (Table 1). In the Belgian case this correlates considerably with supranational role orientations (Hypotheses 1 and 3). Vertical specialisation is not offset by the existence of some ministerial autonomy in Belgium. Within the different Belgian states – federal and sub-national – horizontal specialisation and departmental autonomy exist, but it remains limited. In contrast to Sweden, the process of vertical specialisation of large autonomous agencies from small ministries has not taken place to the same extent. At the sub-national and federal levels a collegial mode of policy-making is reflected in the Belgian co-ordination mechanism for EU policies. It is a very extensive system involving most administrative stake-holders and decisions have to be taken by consensus.

Veto Players
The Belgian polity has more veto players than the Swedish, and relations between veto players, notably the autonomous sub-national units and the federal level, are competitive. This is consistent with the hypothesised vague instructions and the adoption of supranational role perceptions among Belgian bureaucrats (Hypotheses 4 and 5). Let us consider some of these veto players in more detail.

An important feature of the Swedish system is neo-corporatism which integrates interest organisations into important policy-making processes. In this respect Sweden is not too different from the neo-corporatist tradition in Belgium. But whereas Swedish interest associations become involved – although mostly in an informal way – during the stage of domestic EU policy shaping, in Belgium stakeholders are included only at later stages, namely
when EU policies are implemented (Bursens 2002b; Pedersen 2001). Second, Belgium has more political veto players. The number of political parties is two times larger and they are organised along the linguistic divide, cabinets contain more ministers, and governing coalitions usually include more political parties than in Sweden (Anderson 2002). Third, Belgian federalism requires that the federated and the federal governments must reach agreement on almost every dossier that is discussed in the Council of Ministers. In addition, the centrifugal nature of Belgian federalism means that federated units are constantly striving to increase their autonomy and to protect their achievements. Bursens has labelled this ‘vertical institutional jealousy’ and Börzel names it ‘competitive federalism’ (Börzel 1999; see also Bursens 2002a; 2002b). Bursens argues that this diverts political attention away from Europe: it leads to weak instructions and leaves much discretion to the bureaucrats. This situation contrasts with Sweden, where the factual autonomy of functional agencies has been challenged by the Swedish EU membership and has led to a re-emergence of national identifications and a plea for reforming the state apparatus towards a more vertically integrated model (Jacobsson et al. 2001). EU membership has stimulated the Swedish to form a Swedish national policy position, while the Belgium domestic reforms constrain the ability to create coherent national policy positions.

Co-ordination and Trust

Sweden has had less than a decade to adapt to the repercussions of EU membership. The Belgian adaptation has been a more incremental lock-in process and has continued over several decades. Sweden became an EU member after a divisive public debate and a referendum (Ekengren and Sundelius 1998). A similar public debate that divides public opinion has never taken place in Belgium. Although Belgian political elites and opinion leaders strongly favour supranational integration, public opinion is more characterised by indifference instead of articulated support or opposition. As Bursens suggests, the pro-European stance among Belgian political elites is also rooted in domestic political circumstances (Bursens 2002a). Distrust in the national level among Belgian regional politicians has inspired pleas for further state reforms, but it has also made the transfer of competencies from the Belgian federal level to the EU level easier to accept. Yet pro-Belgian political leaders have also argued in favour of the EU, because they believe that further European integration keeps the country together (Beyers and Kerremans 2001).

The political leadership in Sweden is quite strongly involved in the Swedish EU co-ordination system. The Swedish co-ordination system is based on the centralised British and French system with great emphasis on central control of domestic representatives, and the participation of the
Swedish legislature in domestic EU decision-making is modelled on the Danish approach (Ekengren and Sundelius 1998: 136–7; Jacobsson et al. 2001: 254; Kassim et al. 2000: 1–2). The importance attached to the role of national parliaments relates to the Swedish belief that democratic legitimacy of the EU system is ultimately vested in democratic processes within the member states. Belgian political elites emphasise the European Parliament as a legitimate democratic institution guaranteeing democracy at the European level (Beyers and Kerremans 2001). These different views on legitimate government are reflected in differences regarding the way legislatures are involved in EU affairs. Comparing the Swedish parliament and the different Belgian legislatures, one finds weak parliamentary involvement in Belgium and moderate involvement in Sweden (Raunio and Wiberg 2000; Vandevivere 1999). For instance, the Belgian federal parliamentary committee on European Affairs meets on a monthly basis or less and does not issue instructions. The Swedish parliamentary committee on EU Affairs meets weekly and may issue instructions to the government. To phrase it differently, the Belgium political-administrative elite trusts that a democratic and effective European governance system is possible. The Swedish political-administrative elite has more trust in domestic democratic government. Differences in trust thus correlate with domestic co-ordination mechanisms, and these factors help explain differences in the supranational roles among the Belgian and Swedish CWP participants (Hypothesis 8).

In Sweden both horizontal and vertical co-ordination have increased after accession (Sundström 1999). The co-ordination role of the FO is increasingly supplemented by co-ordination responsibilities of the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) and by the co-ordinating activities of medium-rank officials in sector ministries and agencies. The co-ordination of Swedish EU affairs is also conducted through a small, collegial inter-ministerial committee system. Moreover, the normal mode of co-ordinating EU dossiers is through informal personal contacts without written agendas and instructions. The strong national role orientation of Swedish CWP participants, however, is also the result of ex post co-ordination with affected ministries and agencies, interest groups and the PR in Brussels. The centralised Swedish co-ordination system provides CWP representatives with fairly binding instructions and little room for supranationalism (Hypotheses 1, 2 and 7) (Kassim et al. 2000: 323).

At first glance, there are some similarities with Belgium. The federal FO remains a central actor and the role of the PMO has increased due to the growing importance of the European Council. However, most sectoral dossiers are rubber-stamped by the FO and the federal PMO are only occasionally involved in sectoral EU dossiers (Kerremans 2000). Some
functional differentiation of co-ordination mechanisms has taken place in Sweden as well. The co-ordinating role of the sectoral ministries and agencies has grown while the role of the Swedish FO is increasingly pictured as that of a ‘post box’ (Sundström 1999). Different parts of the Swedish bureaucratic machinery have established independent relationships with different EU institutions, bypassing overall co-ordination by the Swedish FO. The emergence of supranational roles among some Swedish bureaucrats may reflect this transnationalisation of the Swedish bureaucracy. But in the Belgian case, several analysts have observed that despite the specialised character of domestic co-ordination mechanisms and the geographical proximity to Brussels, such direct networks with the EU institutions remain surprisingly weak (Beyers 1997; Bursens 2002a). The Belgian domestic system is very consensual, involving most sub-national and federal stakeholders.4

CONCLUSIONS

Neither liberal-intergovernmental, neo-functional or multi-level governance approaches clarify why and how varying domestic institutions affect the roles national officials adopt when they take part in EU policy processes. This article has suggested a middle-range approach on ambiguity and representation in the EU by focusing on how domestic institutions ‘hit’ the EU. Empirically, the article began by highlighting contradictory empirical observations in past research concerning the degree of supranationalism among domestic civil servants. This study has shown that Belgian civil servants are more supranationally oriented than Swedish officials due to different domestic institutional constellations. To account for this conclusion, we have suggested a model of ambiguous representation that highlights eight conditions under which civil servants are likely to ‘go supranational’. This model focuses on those primary institutions at the domestic level that mould representational roles, bearing in mind that EU institutions pose additional cues for supranationalism (Trondal 2002).

The empirical examples from the Belgian and Swedish cases suggest that these hypotheses merit attention. Nation states ‘hit’ Europe in different ways and to different degrees depending on how they are formally organised. By studying domestic civil servants attending the CWPs we have been able to study this question at the micro level. It seems that Belgian officials are strongly supranationally oriented because of the vertically and horizontally (sector) specialised government apparatus (H1 and H2); the federal state structure (H3); the large number of competing veto-players (H4 and H5); the great number of actors involved in domestic co-ordination challenging the role of the Foreign Ministry (H6
and H7); and the lack of trust in domestic government accompanied by a high trust in the EU (H8). The Swedish case differs more or less strongly on all these variables.

Our study supports the established insight that domestic institutions filter and mediate processes of European integration writ large. As governance levels increasingly interact, what happens at one level affects substantially what happens at other levels. Despite the complexity involved in processes of system integration and transformation in Europe, the converging and homogenising effects of EU institutions are filtered by existing domestic institutional conditions. We have offered a middle-range analytical approach and empirical examples that specify some conditions under which domestic institutions matter.

NOTES

The research reported in this article is financially supported, in Norway, by the ARENA programme (the Norwegian Research Council), Agder University College and Sørlandets kompetansefond, and in Belgium by the Fund for Scientific Research-Flanders. Earlier versions have been presented at the Norwegian conference in political science, 10–12 January 2003, Trondheim, Norway, at the Biannual European Union Studies Association Conference, 27–29 March 2003, Nashville, Tennessee, USA, and at the Politicologenetmaal, 22–23 May 2003, Dordrecht, the Netherlands. The authors acknowledge the valid comments from the participants at these conferences and in particular the insights provided by Thomas Christiansen and Mark Rhinard.

1. For instance, a federal polity with a two-party system (one government party and one opposition party) and a pluralist system of interest mediation might have fewer veto players than a unitary polity with multi-party coalitions and a corporatist system of socio-economic policy-making.

2. It is somewhat counterintuitive, but it seems to us that the existence of many veto players (as in the Belgian case) may explain the lack of domestic consultations with domestic constituencies (politicians and interest groups) before they start negotiating in the Council.

3. It is important to note that both countries – Belgium and Sweden – face complex, inconsistent and contradictory reform pressures on the central administration. On the one hand, EU membership calls for a vertical integration of the politico-administrative system – particularly in relation to the Council of Ministers. On the other hand, New Public Management reforms force the civil service towards vertical disintegration, devolution and increased contractualism (see Christensen and Laegreid 2001).

4. For instance, an average co-ordination meeting at the federal FO may include 25 different governmental stakeholders.

REFERENCES


