



## Cultures of States and Informal Governance in the EU

*An exploratory study of elites, power and identity*

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**Cultures of States and Informal Governance  
in the EU**

**An exploratory study of elites, power and identity**

**Ulf Hedetoft**

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## PREFACE

This Occasional Paper consists of two parts. The first is a pre-print of a chapter which I have contributed to Piattoni, Simona & Christiansen, Thomas, eds, *Informal Governance in the European Union*, forthcoming with Edward Elgar in late 2003 or early 2004. The second part is an Appendix, which on the one hand offers some supplementary reflections and framing commentaries on the theory and conceptualization of state culture, political culture and national culture (as well as their interconnections), concepts which are crucial to the argument presented in the article - and on the other hand develops these concepts in relation to three of the core member-states of the EU: the UK, France and Germany. This second part is truly an appendix: whereas the book chapter can be read in and for itself, the second part assumes familiarity with the argument developed in the article.

I am grateful to all those friends and colleagues with whom I have had the opportunity to discuss earlier versions of these texts, particularly to the members of the EU-funded network on Informal Governance in which the publication referred to above originates.

Ulf Hedetoft  
Aalborg, March 2003

## **CULTURES OF STATES AND INFORMAL GOVERNANCE IN THE EU**

### **An exploratory study of elites, power and identity**

Ulf Hedetoft

The aim of this chapter is twofold: First, to develop the concept of state culture, distinguish it from that of political culture, and relate it to the notion of informal governance. And second, to apply this concept to the EU and its different types of relations with and impact on the member-states. Sections 1, 2 and 3 are devoted to the first of these objectives, section 4 to the second, while the concluding section 5 attempts to extract the most significant results of the analysis, but also to point up a number of problems and issues (both empirical and methodological) that are in serious need of further investigation along these lines.

#### 1. State formation and state culture in western democracies: charting the territory

States are sites of power and authority which historically have served both elite purposes and broader societal interests. They have always maintained and legitimated themselves with reference to providing people(s) with security from outside threats and domestic menaces, to meeting collective needs, to protecting group cultures and identities, and so on--all in the name of some kind of Allgemeinheit and 'general will' (although these concepts derive from European modernity and are characteristics of the modern bourgeois state). Historically, they have increasingly become institutionalized and democratized. Max Weber's tripartition of state authority into traditional, charismatic and rationalistic-legalistic (Weber 1957) captures a development from personalized (arbitrary) forms and discourses of power toward more legalistically bounded and possibly more predictable power exertion, but it also conceals the

fact that both traditionalism, charisma and other culturally determined dimensions have not disappeared, but have agglutinated within the umbrella that formal rationalism and institutionalism provide (Steinmetz 1999).

Historically, this tendency for a formal institutionalization of state authority goes hand in hand with the democratization of states, the tripartition of power, and the territorialization of sovereignty, collapsed into the modern western nation-state, its political forms of legitimacy, and its reproduction of authority on the basis of citizenship, parties, public debates, elections, nationally based collective identities, and political cultures. In this way the western state maintains itself on the basis of popular backing, accountability, and service to the 'national interest', in an institutional and discursive shell of objectivity, anonymity and impartiality. Hence, contemporary state structures (re)present themselves as the antithesis of arbitrariness and subjectivity. Whenever the personal or cultural dimension of power is touched on, it usually appears as a deplorable deviation from objective standards of law, bureaucracy and fair-minded policy-making: as corruption, clientelism, or incompetence - or as features of non-democratic, totalitarian states. In the same spirit, people tend to react to the culturally steeped state practices that they become aware of - frequently in the form of public scandals - by applying a two-pronged evaluative standard: on the one hand the rational norm of fairness, equality and transparency, on the other politicians' or bureaucrats' breaches of this norm. Recent and current corruption cases in different European countries (notably Germany, France, Spain and Belgium) and public reactions to them are illustrations of this point.<sup>1</sup>

All this tends to gloss over two important aspects of state. First, that the more the area of politics has become institutionalized and democratized, the more it has also turned into a relatively independent social and cultural domain, with its own rules, rituals, symbolics, interactive practices and communicative values. And secondly, that although it is no doubt

true that laws, regulations, accountability etc. tend to impose constraints on the personnel of politics, it is just as true that the definition and practice of 'rational' norms and values constitute a reflexive, negotiable and interpretive undertaking, where aspects such as the education of elites, personal interests and backgrounds, the rituals and traditions of power, the sociological composition of parliament, legal offices and bureaucracies, the balance between consideration for party interests and state interests - and much more - play a significant role.

In this sense, politics is cultural norms, 'ways of doing things', a ritual geared both to the overall teleology of states, and the individual approach by political actors to this teleology and how it fits their perception of politics and their political intentions (Lloyd & Thomas 1998). At stake here are the discourses, practices and actions of those individuals (politicians, bureaucrats, civil servants ...) whose professional lives play themselves out in the institutions of 'state',<sup>2</sup> according to forms of interaction, systems of meaning and communicative codes that we generally designate as 'cultural'. These practices can be studied at two interlocking levels: an 'anthropological' and a 'political'. The former tries to uncover the cultural backgrounds and processes of interaction, discourse and communication that play themselves out continuously as political actors relate to each other both in formal and informal settings. The latter is more interested in the effects of such interactions on political preferences and policy- and decision-making outcomes, particularly if and when they deviate from the formal 'script' and from what might have been expected had the actors stuck to their 'rational' roles.<sup>3</sup>

Before addressing the specifics of state cultures,<sup>4</sup> we need to clarify points of similarity and difference between 'state culture' and the related but not identical concept of 'political culture'.

## 2. State culture and/vs political culture

'Political culture' refers to rules, norms, values and practices according to which politics and

the use of power plays itself out - or ideally should play itself out - in the interaction between 'state' and 'nation'. They are widely accepted as the basis of perceptions, discourses and actions/behaviour related to politics, law and constitutionality, citizenship, democracy, representation and nationality (Almond & Verba 1963; Klingemann & Fuchs 1995; Woshinsky 1995). This understanding embraces explicit political ideologies as well as implicit commonsense notions prevailing among national populations, but also different types of communicative links between state and civil society. Political culture is the result of specific forms of historical interaction between these two societal domains (different in different nation-states) and constitutes the receptacle of commonly shared political values in given political communities. Such values are mediated between political actors and 'the people' by means of the mass media, agencies of law, the educational system and other agents of socialization, result in the creation and development of the public sphere and public opinion, and find their highest form of expression in the event par excellence of political culture, i.e. elections. To an important extent, political culture can legitimately be regarded as the popular internationalization of discourses, values and norms mediated - top-down - to the people by agents of the state. In this sense, some aspects of state culture re-emerge as constituent parts of political culture, though often in renegotiated and reconfigured form. It would be wrong, however, to see this as a monocausal and one-way process: political culture is a domain which is constantly being renegotiated by interactions between political actors and the institutions they represent, citizens, pressure and interest groups, the media, academia etc., as well as being influenced by international processes of transvaluation, where cultural standards and behavioural forms in this field are 'mimetically' transmitted from one country to another.

In this context it is understandable why the notion of 'state culture' has not so far been recognized as a separate analytical concept: the state and its actors are not supposed to

close culturally around themselves, but to act within a broadly defined political culture, to conduct cultural policies, and to represent the national culture to international partners. In other ways than this, the state is supposedly 'culture-less', unbiased, free of prejudice, without special interests and identities of its own. And yet everybody has a hunch that states and their political elites have cultural peculiarities of their own. We all 'know' that there is something culturally specific about the French state and the self-image it cherishes and upholds; that the British state elites are deeply entrenched in Old Boys' Networks and many other forms of networking; that US political elites benefit from networks embedded in college alumni associations and that the US presidency is not just a power institution run according to legal-rational principles, but is deeply involved with and influenced by personalities, media and commercial interests, groups of lobbyists and so on, firmly entrenched within normative understandings of the world structured by history, morality and socialization (Greenstein 2000).

Furthermore, evidence of the existence of state cultures and their difference from political cultures is in plain sight in the form of public revelations of illicit dealings, corrupt behaviour, behind-the-scenes bargaining and secret agreements. 'Political scandals' are the form that normative clashes assume between what is acceptable and common at the level of state-cultural practices and, on the other hand, what is legitimate and morally in order according to national political cultures. Their prevalence in Europe - based on a historically rooted sensitivity of European politics and European publics to inconsistencies between rule and practice - testifies both to the strength of normative rationality as a set of ideal expectations about democratic rule, but also to the fact that among political actors such expectations seem to be honoured almost as much in the breach as in the observance. This paradoxical duality (and the widespread public interest in its manifestations) in turn springs from the historical and cultural complexities of the European state: its origins in feudalism

and absolutism and the concomitant longevity of legal-administrative traditions; the dialectics of totalitarianism and popular, democratic rule within the context of the modern nation-state; the abiding significance of the charismatic politician and of extensive trust in wise leadership; and most importantly, the prominent status of the state as ultimate societal regulator, arbiter, cohesive glue, provider of both order and welfare, and site of legitimate coercion. More than anywhere else in the world, historically the state in Europe is thus simultaneously the vehicle of continuity and modernity, justice and freedom, strong guidance and liberal permissiveness. These dimensions of the European state form privilege strong and dominant interactions, to the point of conflictuality, between formal rule and informal governance, transparency and secretiveness, accountability and efficiency - dualisms that necessarily rub off on forms of governance in the EU. This question also implies reviewing the extent to which the EU is a state-like construct and how member-state cultures and EU proto-state informal governance interact and intersect. Before addressing these issues, a few reflections are in order on the different dimensions of state culture.

### 3. Dimensions of state culture

Cultures of states can be analyzed within six sub-domains: i. Structural specificities of states; ii. Ritual practices; iii. State-specific discourses and meanings; iv. Forms of communication and interaction; v. Socialization of state actors; vi. International/foreign relations.

i. Structural specificities of states. In a sense this is a question of how the labours of state are divided among different institutions and actors. Constitutional monarchies leave a lot of the symbolic, cultural and moral work to their royal houses. Republics are in a different situation and typically invest their presidencies with excessive political, symbolic and cultural meaning (e.g. France), or give greater importance to their political leadership as distinct from weaker presidencies (e.g. Germany). In the same vein, it must be presumed to be significant

for state cultures in specific states (and obviously in the EU in particular) if they possess developed civil societies underpinning them (as in most full-fledged democracies), or if these societies are weak or hardly existing (as in Russia or numerous states in Africa); whether the state is unitary or federal, highly centralized or not, 'authoritarian' (like the UK) or 'popular' (like Switzerland), and so forth. Such structural properties co-determine political actors' understanding of key issues like legal constraint, rule of law, and accountability, and engender more or less propitious conditions for informal governance.

ii. Ritual practices. This refers to ritualized practices (and related discourses) that serve purposes of initiation, mediation, commemoration, symbolization, solemnification etc. - stately rites of passage (Kertzer 1988). Under this heading would fall, for instance, the opening of parliaments, royal and presidential addresses to the nation, state funerals and state weddings, court procedures, international state visits and diplomatic and other kinds of protocol, commemorative celebrations of war heroes, and so forth. To some extent this field represents a partial confluence with the arena of political culture, but it should not be overlooked that they are rituals of the state proper and as such function to weld the actors of state together within a set of common symbolic codes and practices whilst keeping their national historical memories and their sense of state continuity alive. In this sense, they provide a significant stylized framework for the processes outlined under item iv below.

iii. State-specific discourses and meanings refers to ways in which the state represents and constructs itself, both to the nation and to its own agents. Hence this sub-domain contains political ideologies, programmatic formulations of purpose, and value-oriented, normative justifications of states, democracy, politics, and concrete as well as symbolic actions on the part of governments, parties, civil servants and the legal system. It also includes notions like wise leadership, political charisma, and the personification of politics, as well as discourses pertaining to such constructs of stateness. Also in this field

there is important dynamic interaction between state culture and political culture to be observed, in large measure facilitated by the intermediary role of the mass media.

iv. Forms of communication relates to political communication as it unfolds between political actors and other state representatives, both with regard to forms that are regulated by rules, agendas and law (e.g. parliamentary debates), and those that must be characterized as 'informal' (e.g. interpersonal relations, different kinds of networking). More broadly conceived it relates to the way issues are tabled, questions are debated, negotiated and resolved, and especially methods employed to handle crises, overcome deadlocks and reach consensus across political cleavages. But it also entails questions pertaining to the location (where), locutionary forms and communicative styles (how), and personnel (who), of and with whom communication, interaction and networking take place and where different forms of 'speech acts' (Searle 1969), more or less informative, directive or persuasive, are employed in political rhetoric and help construe and define processes and outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

v. Socialization of state actors. Socialization in general is a blanket area within which both 'political' and 'state' culture is inculcated and adopted. As regards political culture, the sub-domain comprises education for citizenship and thus the important question of how people are shaped as political individuals, both in terms of reasoning and behaviour. Socialization is therefore the process through which a political culture is acquired. As regards state culture, political culture in this sense is the necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for learning and practicing the culture of statecraft, generally as well as with reference to a specific politico-national culture. But more is required. As regards socialization understood as a historical process of shaping individuals through interlocking stages of education, social practice and action, we need particularly to focus on what is commonly referred to as elite institutions, intended to prepare selected individuals for positions of high responsibility in state institutions and private business (e.g. Grandes Ecoles in France, Oxbridge in the UK, Ivy

League universities in the USA; the EU corollary would be institutions like the Collège d'Europe in Bruges and the European University Institute in Florence), but also on cultural-political socialization within and among elite families which must be presumed to have a decisive impact on the culturally formative processes of would-be political elites (Bourdieu 1979; Cohen 1981). As regards socialization in the sense of 'ongoing cultural formation and interaction within a particular societal domain', the state, its institutions, agents, practices and structural specificities (including political parties), is a seat of cultural learning in its own right, a locus for practically imparting to political novices the cultural skills of the trade: how to interact and communicate with other actors, how to interpret rules, how to make personal relations contribute to the achievement of political goals, how to address the nation (or 'the European public'), how to legitimize different courses of action, how to construct 'identities of state' etc. This field, which is highly relevant to the EU level as well, also comprises cultural networking and the meanings attached to elite cultural activities outside the area of state activity proper, e.g. in the arts (participation and promotion), sports (as leisure-time activity, e.g. golf and tennis), or charity - where important links are made and maintained and cultural-political lessons are learned and disseminated among state actors.

vi. International/foreign relations: This last sub-domain is both a thematic field in its own right and a political arena where items i-v play themselves out in an exceptionally lucid way - the more so the more strongly processes of transnationality affect the depth and incidence of extra-territorial political encounters. As a thematic field, external relations/foreign politics constitutes an area of diplomacy, negotiation, bargaining and decision-making with a set of norms, values, communicative practices, discourses and (formal or informal) rules all its own, constrained only weakly by domestic relations and political cultures. Here actors emerge and interact exclusively as representatives of state(s) with the notions of external sovereignty, interests and identities that belong to them. The line between

political culture and state culture is unambiguously drawn, or, in other words, political culture becomes totally absorbed by the culture of states. More often than not, encounters, meetings and negotiations take place away from the public eye (but not always, viz. the institution and protocol of the 'state visit'),<sup>6</sup> and since they are also, more often than not, less tied down by institutional constraints than they would be domestically, communication, interpretations, rituals and outcomes are the result of the 'pure' interaction of representatives of states. In this sense, state cultures must be supposed to be both enacted and in some measure created in this arena.

#### 4. Cultural aspects of informal governance in the EU

While it is true that the concept of state culture is in itself worth pursuing, it is in the field of international relations and European integration that it acquires conceptual and historical potency. As a specific form of international organization, the EU is not just a hybrid between intergovernmental and supranational features, but one which likes to model itself on and be judged by nation-state criteria of governance, authority and legitimacy. In other words it builds on but also (in the discourse of political ambitions at least) intends to replicate the member-states on these dimensions (including the ambition of constructing a 'European identity'), and hence constantly grapples with problems of democratic accountability, decision-making transparency, and how to combine the diversity of administrative practices, political cultures and forms of governance represented by its constituent units into a coherent whole.

As both an international organization and a kind of European proto-state, the EU is saddled with the state-cultural dualisms of its member-states in a very specific way. As an international organization, it (i.e. its institutions and representatives, bureaucrats as well as political actors) enjoys the freedom from domestic accountability that belongs to the area of

foreign policy and international bargaining - in this sense (no autonomous public sphere of its own, no handed-down constraints of political culture) the EU is more prone to informal governance and state-cultural interaction than nation-states. But as a proto-state in the making, a potential rival for the trust of EU citizens, the reverse applies: in this regard, it must constantly prove itself to these (would-be) citizens according to the normal rules of fairness, rationality, efficiency and accountability - both through the meticulousness of its administrative and legislative practices, through openness of political communication, and by seeking to agree on a constitutional framework of rights and duties that would lend democratic legitimacy to the European project and its political architects. In this sense, the EU, even more than its member-states, needs to pay attention and be committed to the formalities of a kind of governance which so far is without proper government.

Thus, Europeanization of the political game entails a heightened and increasingly dense encounter between state cultures in a field which is neither pure domestic, nor pure foreign politics, but where cultural backgrounds, networking across borders, personalities, intersubjective likes and dislikes, intercultural communication, leadership qualities, rhetorical and discursive strategies, institutional socialization, interpretations of purpose and trajectories, histories of EU membership and knowledge about/relations with other state identities acquire significance for agenda-setting, negotiation, compromises and decision-making - or, seen from the perspective of the individual member-state, for the best possible outcome of its attempt to transform sovereignty into maximum influence on the European bargaining process (Egeberg 1999; Hooghe 1999; Kreppel 2001; Moravcsik 1998; Saurugger 1999). The fact, for instance, that the EU's administrative and legal practices, because of the history of the Union, have been much more fundamentally shaped by French political thinking, linguistic coding and styles of interaction than for instance Spanish, Swedish or British, must be taken into account in explaining both the trivia of day-to-day contact in the institutions of the EU, but

also the way in which for instance the Delors Commissions engineered the integrated campaign for European Identity and the Single Market in the 1980s and in the process engendered an elitist discourse of supranationality which the present chair of the European Convention, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, commands with great ease, whereas it estranges and antagonizes many other cultural paradigms trying to challenge the dominance of French state culture in the EU.

It is further the assumption of this chapter that such processes not just activate but also transform state cultures and state identities in a significant way, cultures that in turn co-determine the European game of politics, whether in its pro-integrationist or its (re)nationalizing format (Hedetoft 1998). This transformation process raises three fundamental and interlocking issue areas regarding the European Union as a specific and unique form of international regime. I shall call them the analytical, the processual and the consequential dimensions of the problematic, respectively.

The analytical dimension concerns the relationship between the universal and the state-specific aspects of political codes, discourses, rituals, practices and conventions. On the one hand, it follows from the argument so far that what sets these state cultures apart from, say, popular cultures or the arts, springs from the fact that the domains in question are all states, endowed with a certain kind of power and authority, and vested in individuals who continuously (re)interpret and (re)apply the political and moral rules of the game. In this sense, a trans-state epistemic community - a field of cultural mutuality - can reasonably be assumed, dominated by an understanding for the plight and constraints of the others, and further reinforced by the commonalities of interest that membership of the EU and the integrative process entail. On the other hand, the specific forms, discourses, interests and practices of different states and state cultures tend to hamper this understanding (or at least some practical consequences of it), partly because these forms are not directly (institutionally)

in evidence and cannot be immediately deduced from the more objectively encrusted forms of state as regulated by laws, regulations and well-known traditions, and partly because the core rationale of each state may, by the actors themselves, be seen to reside in precisely the unique but possibly only half-realized state cultures of which they themselves are the carriers and reproducers. This latter point directly addresses the extent to which nation-state identity at the level of historical affectiveness rather than that of rational interest formulation impinges on the mental and behavioral horizon of state actors.

In terms of the EU, this ambivalence needs to be empirically analyzed in light of (a) the potential easing of political communication and policy-making as contained in the first point, and (b) the potential hampering of communication and motivation as contained in the second. And both scenarios need to be sensitive to the specific institutional contexts (Council, Commission, Parliament, ECJ...) and their impact on the communicative process. For the purposes of this chapter, two brief examples will have to suffice: a. The informal and personalized aspects of the French-German entente; b. the process and the logic underlying Mrs [Lady] Thatcher's attempts to have the characteristics of 'the Germans' exposed by an expert think-tank in 1990. Space does not permit lengthy discussions - the cases are cited mainly to provide some initial pointers in the direction that further investigations should take us.

As regards (a), my argument posits that the evolution of the French-German 'special relationship' from the early 50s onward is not simply the result of objectively definable common national interests in pushing the EU integration process forward, but has substantively, in its ups and downs, been dependent (as a conditionality more than possibly a cause) on the informalities of networking among leading political actors and their degree of 'epistemic' understanding and communication in the context of their respective state-cultural traditions and perceptions of future trajectories. Here the French term 'entente' acquires

additional meaning. Where the personal-communicative interaction between Adenauer and de Gaulle - owing to the divergence in their educational backgrounds, experiences and worldviews - was limited, strained, pragmatic, and contributed to the difficulty of overcoming their two countries' mutual troubles in the 60s (see e.g. Bange 2000), the level of understanding and mutual sympathy between Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing (70s) and Kohl and Mitterrand (80s) was better and more conducive to making the political entente between their countries an effective pivotal axis for the integration process. All four were deeply influenced by a quasi-aristocratic and (with the partial exception of Kohl) intellectual-elitist mindset at several removes from the average citizen and any constraining interpretation of democracy as regards popular or parliamentary accountability or stringent legal process. Their state interests may not have been formed by their interaction, but there is good reason to assume that both the beginnings of EPC in the 70s, the conciliatory celebrations of Verdun in 1985, German unification and the entire Maastricht process received considerable impetus (and a propitious climate) from the informal and personal dimensions of interaction among heads of state operating in a national context relatively free from parliamentary and popular control and in an international (European) context of transnational bargaining, where personalities have a considerable impact on political outcomes.

The (b) example is an encapsulation of a very different configuration. At the time of German reunification (and the two significant IGCs on economic and political integration, later to be merged into one) in 1990, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher set up a think-tank to investigate and lay bare the true national characteristics of 'the Germans' (Ridley 1990). Faced with a new international/European situation that unleashed all kinds of dormant stereotypes of aggressive Germans and hostile intentions, but also a new type of EU political landscape, the British head of state invoked scholarly expertise to help her understand the underlying motives of this continental national character in its political manifestations. Her

own cultural-historical baggage was informed by insular sentiment and national prejudice so such an extent that it made her unable to pass any kind of reasoned judgment on the intentions of the German political leadership, let alone call upon transnational elite understanding or empathy that might have aided her in this endeavour. The gulf of political intentionality between the Thatcherite vision of Europe and that of Kohl, in spite of their shared Conservatism of outlook, hampered any rapprochement of understanding, leading her instead to tap into time-honoured models of comprehending and explaining the world. The creation of the think-tank is, of course, evidence of some measure of doubt and uncertainty about German developments. On the other hand, the naivité and banality of its remit (the assumption being that it is possible to draw conclusions about political intentions and behaviour from a strawman called the 'German national character') testifies to the depths of non-comprehension and bewilderment (which in turn owed a lot to the extensive degree of personal non-involvement between the executives of the UK and Germany). The case exemplifies how not just different state interests mentally 'collide', but also how the collision is aided and abetted by an executive culture of ignorance and an historically informed interpretive lens which allows policy-making to be invaded by the gross generalizations of its underlying national identity as regards the 'negative Other'. There is little doubt that this incident is an integral part of the process of increasing British EU-scepticism around 1990, bolstering the confrontational policies that Mrs Thatcher incorporated and in turn leading to the intra-Conservative showdown and her subsequent fall from power in November of that year.

Such events and interactions directly lead to questions concerning the processual dimension. Since the EU involves many more, and more intensive, meetings between national politicians and civil servants at all levels, debating an increasing variety of topics, a central question in this context is to what extent this tends to forge a supranational elite culture in the

EU (a commonality of understanding and normative judgement that can work as overt or covert blueprints for interaction and decision-making), both less constrained by domestic considerations and regulations than earlier and also with more scope to shed the formalistic-democratic components of nation-state accountability structures in favour of more personalized processes of speedy, efficient decision-making. The so-called democratic deficit - and different ways of remedying it (subsidiarity, EU citizenship, transparency of procedure, working toward an EU 'Constitution' and so forth) - finds its rationale in this configuration of state interests and identities. Here, networking theories must be widened to encompass the subjective power dimension (Piana 2001; Rhodes & Marsh 1992): networking across borders, particularly within the executive domain, and based on the convergence of partial common interests and common value parameters or, as Héri-tier (1999) has suggested, on 'subterfuge strategies' in order to break cultural deadlock situations deriving from the mismatch between the political and bureaucratic practices and expectations of different member-states. Héri-tier's analysis, however, is based on assumptions *ex negativo*: an informal networking culture arises because otherwise the system would prove inefficient. This is plausible, but it is further necessary to contemplate a number of more 'positive' possibilities underlying the forging of a common elite culture in the EU. As expressed in Max Beloff's words on the Franco-German alliance: '...there does seem to have been over the period since 1950 a coming together of the ruling cadres in both countries' (Beloff 1999). Is this true for the EU as a whole, in terms of an ongoing process?

A sound assumption seems to be that the likelihood of the creation of one (or several variants of) EU state culture in the sense outlined increases proportionally to a. the frequency of interpersonal interaction, b. the commonality of interests and cultural backgrounds, c. the supranational character of the institution involved, and c. the 'distance' from national-democratic accountability. Whereas the last point varies on a country-to-country basis,

depending e.g. on what parliamentary control mechanisms have been put in place, the other points must be assumed to evince a more random distribution across the palette of countries, institutions and personalities, but taken together point in the direction of an EU state culture in the making.

Three generally reasonable theses, backed by available but far too scanty research,<sup>7</sup> are that, first, the increasing density and high incidence of personal interaction in all EU institutions, coupled with a low degree of transparency and control of decision-making, constitute an ideal climate for new forms of political interculturalism and informal decision-making; second, that the supranational dimensions of the EU institutions should be expected to contribute most forcefully to an EU culture of informal governance; and, third, that for such reasons there might not be a direct relationship between the 'anthropological' and the 'political' dimensions of state culture at the EU level (cf. section 1), or in other words between the forging of new forms of cultural and communicative interaction (possibly to the point of an emerging EU identity) and the transformation of such interaction into informal decision-making (assuming that power is still primarily vested in the 'intergovernmental' domain, for example in face-to-face meetings of the national executives in the Council of Ministers). However, on the one hand, this fact does not indicate any absolute disaggregation of 'power' and 'culture' (since power is obviously distributed across the entire spectrum of institutions), but rather points to a probable relative dealignment which should be investigated further through empirical case-studies.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, it makes it even more interesting to take a close look at the process of executive interaction (Beloff's 'ruling cadres'), since cultural developments in this field, across traditional forms of national interest representation, would provide a strong indication if a supra- or transnational EU state culture is underway.

A laboratory for the study of these problems and issues contains, inter alia, 'Third Way politics' and the way in which this became negotiated and agreed upon across the

British/German divide (more interesting as a new-found normative consensus in light of the clashes of personalities between Thatcher and Kohl than as a political program per se) (Giddens 1998); the communicative process among Heads of State preceding the imposition of sanctions against Austria; the background (corruption, scandals, incompetence) of the Commission crisis in spring 1999 or the fisheries affair in spring 2002, revealing behind-the-scenes contacts (and consequent outcomes) between the then Spanish Presidency and the Italian Head of the Commission; and more generally forms and patterns of interaction, communication, symbolization and 'face work' (Goffmann 1959) in the European Council, the Cabinet of the Commission, COREPER, etc. By way of exemplification, let me briefly focus on two cases: a. the imposition of sanctions against Austria, and b. the more general issue of scandals and corruption in the Commission.

The case of the sanctions against Austria (CRiSMART 2001) is interesting at three interlocking levels of interest for the problematic in hand: the behavioral, the normative, and that of decision-making. At the behavioral level, it would seem from all available information that the action came about through informal phone and fax contacts, almost overnight, among several Heads of State (notably the French, Belgian and Spanish), and that normal procedures of informing or consulting government ministers, let alone parliaments, as well as linking up with the Commission, were initially by-passed, apparently because the matter was regarded as urgent and/or it was not thought to be necessary since it was regarded or at least legitimated as an intergovernmental, non-EU action. The fact that this kind of discursive consensus on a rather extraordinary measure was possible at all is an indication of a highly interesting and rather novel normative agreement on 'Europe' as the bastion of human (even minority) rights, democracy, anti-totalitarianism and tolerance (Merlingen et al. 2001) - for the manifestation of which the Austrian Freedom Party provided a much-needed occasion, in light of the increasingly severe and uncompromising laws on immigration and asylum that were being put

in place or were being planned in the majority of the EU countries (Jones 2000). The third notable element concerns the swift and direct link between informal talk, public discourse and decision-making (and later implementation) on the sanctions. That they turned out to be a public embarrassment (the report by the three 'wise men' was a face-saving and damage-controlling operation) and worked counter-productively (Lee 2000; Shwayri 2000) should not be allowed to gloss over the fact that the case is a brilliant (and for once, publicly accessible) illustration of the workings of informal networking at the highest level, based on common value parameters, and resulting in tangible political outcomes. Here the anthropological and the political, the normative and the interest-based dimensions of state culture dovetail, complementing each other neatly.

As indicated in section 2, the second issue - the scandals, corruption cases and underhand dealings that haunted the previous Commission - is relevant in this context for three reasons: one pertains to the substance of the cases, the second to the normative ideal of rational and democratic decision-making that the Commission and the EU generally would like to be measured by, and the third to the methodological question of evidence. As for the first, these kinds of cases and proceedings are obvious demonstrations of the power of informal networking and behind-the-scenes politicking and decision-making, though the extent of these activities is difficult to assess and their comparative status and impact on similar dealings at the nation-state level too (on this issue, see further below). The second encapsulates the formal adoption by the EU of the Weberian ideal of rational and transparent decision-making, whether by choice or (historical) necessity, and its acceptance that although the institutional set-up and democratic structures of the EU are, prima facie, different from and contingent on the member-states, still its political procedures and morality should be measured by 'national' standards of democratic political culture. The third question is not the least interesting therefore: informal networking and forms of politics sensitive to public

exposure transform into 'scandals' precisely in the confrontation between the norms of political culture and the practices of state culture. In this sense, 'scandals' are not just an indication of public, legitimate expectations which these cases are found to be in breach of, but they provide concrete evidence (through the media, political debates, and sometime court testimony too) of the existence and permutations of codes, communicative interactions, normativities and elite decision-making processes which constitute state culture. They are thus one of the methodological windows that allow us a sneak view of what, by its very nature, is meant to stay behind closed doors, out of the public eye. They are data-supplying mechanisms, something which is important in view of the methodological difficulties adhering particularly to the 'political' dimensions of state cultures, i.e. empirically documenting their impact on policy-making and giving sensible answers to the question of when state cultures really matter in terms of influencing preferences and outcomes.

This brings us to another kind of consequentialism.

The consequential dimension. The third issue in turn concerns the reflexive impact of this novel construction on the originary national state cultures. Key questions are: Does the relatively homogeneous symbolic coding and its high degree of self-referentiality and perhaps arbitrariness work back on traditional state practices, and if so in what form and shape? Does it affect the commitment to accountability among political actors, and does it impact the perception and authority of the state-cultural domain among the national electorates? Does it introduce a cleavage between the executive and the legislative, with attendant consequences for cultural and symbolic practices within the cultural-subjective dimensions of state action and state discourse (for an interesting analysis of this problem in Britain, see Smith 1999, chapter 8)? Does it impair national democracy, or does it just highlight and expose the functional nature of democratic processes while foregrounding the extent to which politics is always primarily a question of elite interests and interactions, as well as the leadership,

charisma and affective identifications on which popular support for elite politics and political elites is universally based?

Illustrative cases in point here are current political reactions to referenda in Denmark (politicians favouring EU integration increasingly demonstrate annoyance at having their freedom of action constrained by this institution and its most obvious results, the four Danish exemptions) (Hedetoft 2000 a & b); the practice and forms of functionalizing EU decisions for domestic politics, and sometimes blaming the EU for domestic mismanagement or problems deriving from globalization; elite handling of disenchantment with politics, voter volatility and declining trust in political leaders among electorates; the recent mushrooming of public scandals - the 'italianization' of European politics, but with interesting national differences; the new harshness of national migration policies and, lately, discourses as well, in spite of consensual EU rhetoric about the need to protect and disseminate European values like human rights, environmental protection and democratic processes (Andreas & Snyder 2000; Benhabib 2002). For my purposes here, let me dwell briefly on two illustrative cases: a. the Danish opt-outs and b. political scandals/voter disenchantment with politics.

The four Danish exemptions, the direct result of the initial rejection of the Maastricht Treaty by the Danish electorate, impinge on sensitive areas of EU collaboration: foreign and security policy, immigration and asylum, EMU and the Euro, and EU citizenship. They were the price the pro-European political elites had to pay in order to have the TEU accepted by the Danish people, in other words to stay in the EU as a full member. This price, in turn, depends on the peculiar political-cultural tradition of Denmark to head for consensual policies with a broad political and popular mandate, and specifically in EU questions to ask the country for its verdict whenever important treaty amendments or entirely new treaties are on the table. In other words, the Danish political tradition is to conduct politics in such a way that there is - or at least seems to be - little difference between political culture and state culture, which is

meant to be open, responsive to public input, transparent and rational. The exemptions (agreed to graciously by the other EU members in keeping with the first point made above: 'epistemic' understanding for the difficult plight of their Danish colleagues) thus attempted strategically to address two different problems at once: maintaining the close bond (relation of trust) between politics and people and staying in the EU process. The consequences of the price, on the other hand, have nevertheless proved to be not just a lingering popular mistrust in the Danish political leadership (currently channelled into support for the Danish People's Party), but also a tangible feeling among the 'ruling cadres' that they have been marginalized relative to a number of important negotiations and decisions in the EU. The referendum on Denmark's position relative to the Euro in September 2000 was an attempt to break this deadlock and gradually to get rid of this popularly imposed straitjacket on the freedom of action and decision-making of the Danish political leadership. The attempt failed: once again the outcome was a rejection, and since then political actors have taken to a new mixture of tactical wariness and 'straight talk' on the nuisance of being hamstrung in their pursuit of what is in the best interests of Denmark.

In terms of the question of state culture, the conundrum has now produced (or at least helped in the creation of) a differentiation between the old political culture of both vertical and horizontal political consensus, and a new state culture of secrecy, strategic and tactical handling of relations with the electorate (e.g. by using spin doctors and media consultants), a confrontational style and majority rule in some ways reminiscent of Thatcherism, behind-the-scenes negotiations, recourse to legal-administrative rather than explicitly political decision-making procedures, and recently a self-declared break with the arms'-length principle of basing decisions on independent expert advice, as well as attempts to stretch the interpretive limits of the exemptions to the full in order to be able to participate in as many significant EU negotiation and bargaining processes as possible. Or succinctly put: the difficulties presented

by the original Danish state culture for the full participation of the Danish political elite in the 'state cultural' practices of the EU institutional machinery in a number of important areas are contributing to the creation of a severely modified state culture in Denmark itself, where informal political networking (comprising key actors in private business and the media) and the conscious orchestration of state/people relations are increasingly important. The exemptions and elite annoyance at being hemmed in by them are not the only factor in this new kind of politics, but they clearly play a key role.

The second case might seem to exemplify a similar pattern: Informality, networking, arbitrary subjective relations, illicit dealings and corruption at the EU level spilling over to the level of the member-states. This is clearly a possible explanatory framework, though in order to establish this type of causality much more empirical and theoretical work is needed. However, probably a more satisfactory explanation is one that focusses on the effects of economic liberalization and globalization, the downscaling of traditional welfare-state regimes, and the extra space for manoeuvre and influence that this new business-oriented public climate of freedom and deregulation has opened for new degrees and depths of elite networking both inside and across national arenas (so in the EU as well). On the other hand, an interesting adverse and limiting effect of the EU on such informalities of national politics presents itself as a likely option. In spite of the extensive informality of interaction and policy-making within the EU, this does not prevent EU institutions, in their political, legal and administrative (regulatory and harmonizing) capacities, from working as a constraining force on formally unlawful or politically shady dealings at the member-state level. Though it may seem illogical, it actually makes perfect sense. As indicated previously: it is in the central remit of the EU to regulate competition, monitor 'technical' barriers to free trade, impose common standards, supervise and constrain harmful effects of globalization on the EU space, harmonize legal, political and business cultures etc. - and it is further a priority to make the

EU as popular as possible among the citizens of the Union and to counteract voter disillusionment with politics (in large measure breeding on perceptions of self-serving politicians having abandoned their role as national representatives).

These kinds of objectives all favour attempts to regulate and monitor the interaction among member-states in a rational spirit and, not least through the ECJ, to impose standards and strictures, in turn inducing member-states to make public displays of their interest in democratic governance. Hence scandals like the Elf Affair or the Kohl Affair clearly show that informal and illicit practices are indeed widespread (Seibel 1997) - but the reaction on the part of the EU and the member-states involved document just as clearly that the interaction between the EU and its member-states in these cases works in favour of strengthened public watchdog functions, moral condemnation and harsher legal sanctions of practices that are blatantly in breach of the rule of law. It is thus a plausible but somewhat paradoxical conclusion that on the one hand the EU in recent years has had the general effect of counteracting handed-down ways of informal governance at the member-state level (le Gloanec 2001; Hedetoft 2001; Herz 2002). On the other hand, however, it has simultaneously evolved and become dependent on non-Weberian forms of governance within its own political and bureaucratic system - due to the absence of clearly delineated and institutionally workable forms of democratic representation at the EU level, and in the name of decision-making efficiency.

## 5. Conclusions

In light of the exploratory nature of this study, conclusions must necessarily be tentative and point the way forward toward further research. I will briefly summarize the results under five sub-headings: i. How and why do state cultures/informal governance matter? ii. Are they frames rather than causes, or can they be both? iii. Is EU informal governance a state culture

proper? iv. What are the relevant modes of interaction between states and EU. v. Where are we heading?

i. In the broadest possible sense, state cultures are there in both the anthropological and the political meanings of the concept and play a continuous role as the 'subjective' putty holding actors and structures, personalities and institutions, processes and policy decisions together. Not even the most rational, rule-bound and transparent political processes can do without some measure of cultural interaction, interpretation and communication. People are the vehicles and actors of politics and the area must necessarily be influenced by subjective choices, personal preferences, emotional dispositions, psychological states of mind, rituals of interaction, networks of acquaintance, tacit knowledge acquired and sedimented during socialization, and so forth. Nevertheless, the main focus of interest in this chapter has been state culture understood in a narrower sense, i.e. that of the informalities of interaction and policy-making, the forms of contact, discourse and decision-making where subjective resources are being deployed, by design or default, in such a way as to neutralize, impact or transcend 'rational authority'. It makes sense to assume that, in spite of the methodological difficulties involved, this is where state culture makes a clear and visible difference and where it pays off to give special attention to it - not least in the context of the highly personalized and insufficiently democratized processes of EU decision-making.

ii. The answer to the second question, therefore, is that state cultures and particularly modes of informal governance can be both framing conditions and causal elements in political processes. They can facilitate or constrain policy-making, by providing more or less propitious subjective or cultural-communicative conditions for reaching certain outcomes - whether these outcomes are the result of adhering to the rulebook or bending its rules a bit in the name of speed and efficiency. But they can also constitute independent causal factors, determine or co-determine the form and substance of political decisions - something that often

is the case when personal contacts are mobilized for decisions on how to distribute financial resources, or where intransparent and frequently illicit, tacitly agreed and mutually beneficial exchanges of favours, services, power, threats or money underlie political preferences or outcomes. However, the causal impact of informal governance can be traced in many other forms and situations too, and will generally tend to be related to processes of 'supranationalizing' the epistemic political elite community across EU borders, partly for reasons of efficiency, but also because the obscure and deficient accountability structures of the EU present fertile and tempting ground for political actors, many of whom came into the political game precisely because they cherish the prospect of power and of 'making a difference'. Since the informalities of networking and deal-making are particularly widespread in the EU context, and discrete lobbying is one of the major means of interacting with its political and bureaucratic representatives, it is no wonder that multiple decisions are deeply influenced by forms of personalized preference (inter alia those of a national origin that frequently inform the cultural make-up and moral horizon of these representatives) and interpersonal networking.

iii. As a proto-state rather than an international organization, however, the EU cannot afford to get totally swamped by such informal opportunity structures. Hence the tangible manifestations of polarization between extreme cameraderie and extreme legalism; hence the discourses of democracy, subsidiarity, citizenship rights and representation; hence the ostentatious demonstration of washing the Commission's dirty laundry in full public view after the Santer Commission scandals; hence the commitment to human rights in connection with the Austrian Case; hence the White Paper on Governance; and hence the meticulousness with which member-states are monitored with respect, not least, to their observance of the rules of free and fair competition, but also generally their readiness and speed in transforming EU law into national law. Too much and too conspicuous informal governance and cultural

networking tends to counteract the legitimacy to which the EU is (also) committed and on which it is dependent for its future viability.

iv. I have argued that the interaction between member-states and the EU can suitably be approached along three interlocking dimensions: the analytical, which looks at the state-cultural preconditions at the member-state level and the way they spill over into and co-determine forms of governance in the EU institutions; the processual, focussing on the extent to which an EU 'proto-state' culture is emerging as well as on its forms and consequences; and the consequential, devoted to analyzing the reflexive impact of such emergent forms on the ordinary state cultures.

Given the scope of the chapter, the argument has been couched in theoretical and conceptual terms, illustrated with reference to a few selected cases. More work needs to be done, e.g. in terms of applying the framework of the six sub-domains of state culture rigorously to the investigation of EU informal governance. However, it seems to be a more than plausible thesis that interactions between informal governance (in the sense applied in this chapter) at the member-state level and the level of the EU are far from being a linear, unidirectional process moving ineluctably toward ever more 'informality'. Rather, interpersonal networking and formal structures are intertwined at both levels as well as in their different institutional interactions. Whereas in one sense the nature of the EU as a powerful international and in some respects transnational organization privileges a strengthening of informal decision-making and behind-the-scenes bargaining, in another its ambitions to be and be recognized as a proto-state in the making privilege highly regularized and 'rational' structures and processes.

The most conspicuous form in which this paradox manifests itself is in the apparent tendency for the processual dimension to evince ever more examples of informal governance, whilst the consequential seems to move in the opposite direction, particularly in member-

states traditionally characterized by extensive elitism and networking within the 'ruling cadres'. Or to put this point differently: whereas decisions in the EU are often reached using instruments of informal governance, the impact of those decisions on the member-states, once the decisions have been formalized, to a significant degree is to constrain, alter and harmonize state-cultural practices of an informal nature - both because the EU is actively monitoring its constituent parts in its own interests, and because of parliamentary anxiety in the member-states that the EU will gradually erode national sovereignty, in turn strengthening the democratic watchdog functions of parliament and opposition. On balance, therefore, the EU mandates and consequent practices of governments are more rigidly scrutinized, circumscribed and monitored than previously, both by national parliaments and the mass media.

v. The EU itself, however, is vitally dependent on informal governance, both 'negatively': to overcome structural and cultural inertia; and more 'positively': to hone EU institutions and practices into shape to make them fit different national-interest scenarios and to facilitate the dynamics needed to speed up the integration and enlargement process. In spite of the fact that there are counteracting tendencies, and despite the fact that the tendency toward an EU state culture is cross-cut by different and competing institutional rationales, in the ultimate analysis the EU is to a significant extent an elite club of politicians and civil servants, relatively insulated from a need to rationalize their policies and ambitions, and with a relatively free hand to pursue them in a context of dense personalized networking. The final thesis must be, therefore, that as long as the EU builds on rather than supplants the member-states, this 'tendency toward informality' cannot but increase in importance.

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## NOTES

1                      On corruption and clientelism in European politics, see e.g. van Buitenen

(2000), Della Porta and Mény (1997), Piattoni (2001), Pujas (1997), and Warner (2000).

<sup>2</sup> For an interesting early attempt to grapple with these problems, see Dogan (1975).

<sup>3</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into the methodological ramifications of the two approaches, but it must be noted that hypotheses, data and methodological problems are clearly different from one approach to the other. In particular, the 'political' approach raises some difficult questions about how to establish exactly where, how and to what extent specific preferences and outcomes are the result of 'informal governance' deriving from state-cultural interactions, in other words where and how state cultures, especially their component of informal interaction, make a difference in these terms.

<sup>4</sup> During the last decade or so, a number of works have addressed questions pertaining to relations between states, cultures and identities - e.g. Lapid & Kratochwil (1996). By far the majority of them, however, speak to questions relevant to different forms of *interaction* between national/social identities and cultures on the one hand and state practices, discourses and policies on the other, or they deal with more traditional aspects of political culture and cultural policies. For programmatic reflections more closely related to the concerns of this chapter, see e.g. Hylland Eriksen & Neumann (1993). For more in-depth studies of this nature, see the work of Marc Abélès, e.g. 1992 and 1996.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent introduction to these topics, see Fiske (1982). On political discourse theory, see Fairclough (1992) and Howarth & Stavrakakis (2000).

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Kissinger (1994), Berridge (1993), Goldstein (undated mimeo).

<sup>7</sup> Despite valuable work done notably by Marc Abélès (1992,1996), Irène Bellier & Thomas Wilson (2000), Adrienne Héritier (1999), George Ross (1994) and a few

others, we are still in serious need of in-depth longitudinal studies in order to establish whether and in what way we are witnessing an integrative *process* in this area.

<sup>8</sup> Supranationality and intergovernmentalism are not unequivocally a question of institutional separation, but should rather be treated as dimensions of EU politics that are present and active forces within and not just between EU institutions. See for instance Thomas Christiansen's stimulating analysis of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, a potentially 'supranational' constituent in an institution normally conceived as 'intergovernmental' (Christiansen, forthcoming 2003).

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## **APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX

### **I. Supplementary Conceptual Reflections**

In order to frame the objectives this paper has set for itself, notably to investigate the ways in which states use their rules, values and norms, their political and juridical rituals, their historical cultures and their structural specificities in their interactions with other states (comprising also the role which cultural aspects of states play in negotiations and bargaining processes of international relations and European integration), some further conceptual remarks on distinctions applied in the article may be useful.

The modern state is a political unit having a legitimate legal, political, social, and cultural power over individuals (citizens or residents) within a delimited territory. Its establishment as a modern political structure in the 18th and 19th centuries is closely linked to the definition of the nation as shaped by institutions created by the state. Hence, the state is not simply an administrative force, whose role is to control or regulate civil society. It is also an institutional reality, which - though influenced by external forces - has its own internal logic, born of history and nourished by ideology. It acts directly on civil society and shapes its political life.<sup>1</sup> But at the same time this political life is also formed by increasingly standardized, even homogenized international relations, something which in turn raises the question of sovereignty and the changes it is undergoing in the contemporary context of interdependence and globalization. Today, sovereignty is becoming a question of how a state differentiates itself from other states, takes a place in the system of international relations with its own culture and governance - its own identity. And further how the cultural and anthropological dimensions of the state re-emerge in the international (global and European) arena.

The basic premise of the article is that the modern state not just influences, represents (e.g. in external relations) and co-determines aspects of national or popular culture, but that it is also an independent vehicle of a culture of its own. Here I am not thinking first and foremost of 'elite culture(s)',<sup>2</sup> but of general as well as nationally specific attributes of 'state' as a densely institutionalized domain for communication, negotiation, networking and eventually decision-making. We are talking, in other words, about the discourses, practices

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1 Cf. Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, Cambridge, 1979; Paul B. Evans, Daniel Rueschemeyer & Theda Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge, 1985; William Sewell Jr., "Ideologies and Social Revolutions. Reflections on the French Case", *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 57, no.1, 1985.

2 See e.g. Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction*, Paris, 1979 [English version: *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Cambridge, MA, 1984]; Abner Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1981; Joao de Pina-Cabral and Antónia Pedroso de Lima, *Elites. Choice, Leadership and Succession*, Oxford, 2000.

and actions of politicians, bureaucrats and civil servants - people whose professional lives play themselves out in the institutions of 'state'.<sup>3</sup>

During the last decade or so, a number of works have addressed questions pertaining to relations between states, cultures and identities, not least in the context of international relations, notably the following: Dennis J. Coyle and Richard J. Ellis, *Politics, Policy and Culture*, Boulder, 1994; Ulf Hedetoft, *Signs of Nations. Studies in the Political Semiotics of Self and Other in Contemporary European Nationalism*, Aldershot, 1995; Dominique Jacquin-Berdal, Andrew Oros and Marco Verweij, eds, *Culture in World Politics*, Houndmills, 1998; Jill Krause and Neil Renwick, eds, *Identities in International Relations*, Houndmills, 1996; Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil, eds, *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, Boulder and London, 1996; Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, eds, *Comparative Politics. Rationality, Culture and Structure*, Cambridge, 1997; David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State*, London and New York, 1998; George Steinmetz, ed., *State/Culture. State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*, Ithaca and London, 1999; Oliver H. Woshinsky, *Culture and Politics. An Introduction to Mass and Elite Behavior*, New Jersey, 1995. However, all of these contributions - and many more - primarily address questions relevant to different forms of interactions between national/social identities and cultures on the one hand and state practices, discourses and policies on the other, or they deal with more traditional aspects of political culture and cultural policies. At best, they marginally touch on state cultures in the form of 'identities of states', e.g. as varying conceptions and practices of sovereignty in the framework of modernization and globalization. However, for programmatic reflections more closely related to the ones at stake in the article, see the inspirational article calling for systematic studies of the 'anthropology of states' by Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Iver B. Neumann, 'International Relations as a Cultural System: An Agenda for Research', *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1993. For more in-depth studies of this nature, see particularly the work of Marc Abél's, e.g. *La vie quotidienne au parlement européen*, Paris, 1992, and *En attente d'Europe*, Paris, 1996. See also Bent Flyvbjerg's detailed study of a concrete case of municipal planning in the City of Aalborg, *Magt og Rationalitet* (1991; English version: *Power and Rationality*, Chicago, 1999), and its demonstration of the factual and often 'irrational' processes of power exertion and decision-making. Finally, for innovative work on the nature of clientilism and its relations to democracy, see Simona Piattoni (ed.), *Clientelism, Interests, and Democratic Representation*, Cambridge, 2001.

As already indicated in the article, I understand 'political culture' to refer to rules, norms, values and practices according to which politics and the use of power plays itself out - or ideally should play itself out - in the interaction between 'state' and 'nation'. This

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3 For an interesting early attempt to grapple with these problems, see Mattei Dogan, ed., *The Mandarins of Western Europe. The Political Role of Top Civil Servants*, London, 1975.

understanding embraces explicit political ideologies as well as implicit commonsense notions prevailing among national populations, but also different types of communicative links between state and civil society. In one sense, political culture can be imagined as the popular internationalization of discourses, values and norms mediated to the people by state actors. Some aspects of state culture re-emerge, therefore, as constituent parts of political culture - because we are here speaking to the ways in which people generally see themselves, their interests, identities, and their rights and duties as represented by politicians and political and legal institutions, rather than agents of politics defining their own political realm to themselves or others. But political culture is also a domain which is constantly being reshaped by interactions between political actors and the institutions they represent on the one hand, and citizens, interest groups, the media, academia etc. on the other, while further being influenced by international processes in which cultural standards and behavioural forms are transmitted from one country to another.

Political culture in turn is a constituent part of 'national culture', but they are not coterminous. National culture on the one hand is a wider, more all-embracing concept - on the other is it much more of an interpretive and historical construction. At the former level, national culture connotes historical, symbolic, ritualistic, literary, aesthetic, linguistic, communicative and ethnographic - in a word, 'ethnic' - homogeneity. It signals that the nation-state and its national identity are based on common values, traditions, practices, on a shared set of meanings and memories characterizing people living within a historically well-defined territory. Thus people become constituted as 'the' people, as a community (ethnic) and not just as a society (civic). National culture belongs to the former, political culture more clearly to the latter, although - as indicated - political culture, in part or *in toto*, is often incorporated into definitions of what uniquely typifies particular nation-states. However, by ideal-type, national culture is most often imagined as an apolitical notion, the 'natural' underpinning of identity as well as politics.

At the latter level (national culture as construction), it appears less as an organic, homogeneous cultural system, and more as the result of collective remembrance and amnesia, of a long process of selective perception that bears the imprint of constructive endeavours by elites, institutions and nationally-minded influential individuals intent on stamping a culturally exclusive exceptionalism on particular nation-states, a project that has turned out highly successful in numerous cases and has become incorporated both broadly and deeply into the mindset of national citizenries. In Gellner's interpretation, aspects of 'volkish' culture were historically taken over and reinterpreted by national elites, only later to be 'returned' to the people as a nationally distinct culture, language, morality, religion etc.<sup>4</sup> The result is the existence of 'imagined communities', perceived units of homogeneous culture (a reflexive,

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4 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Cambridge and Ithaca, 1983. On Gellner's work, see particularly John A. Hall, ed., *The State of the Nation*, Cambridge, 1998.

self-enforcing notion) that exaggerate internal cultural similarities and downplay similarities between Self and the foreign Other. This is not a process without friction and ambiguity. The more difficult it is to conceal heterogeneities within national cultures (respectively, the more cultural diversity is openly recognized, or the more nationalism is not an ideology that can be officially embraced), the more reliant 'national identity' is on the political and constitutional values embedded in the political culture and on the state and its predominant agents as the provider of an overarching framework of identification and cohesion. This is the rationale underlying, among others, Jürgen Habermas' theorizing on and calls for a 'constitutional patriotism' in postwar Germany, but also explains the place of US constitutional values in homogenizing constructions of 'American national identity'.

In this way, political culture constitutes the 'transmission belt' between the nation/its culture and the state. Inversely, the culture and ethnicity of the nation constitute the ideal 'argument' for having a political culture as well as a political superstructure of national origin. In one respect, political culture and national culture are similar: they both imply a set of commonly shared meanings and real or ideal practices (shared by all or most members of a national community) - including, by implication, also the individuals who temporarily or permanently represent the state, who, on that basis, are supposed to act rationally and think coolly about the interests of the nation - in its many shapes as 'people', 'electors', 'interest groups', 'generations', 'consumers' or just 'citizens'. Thus, they are supposed to serve the 'general interest' of all (national) society, along the lines of commonly shared values and specifically formulated goals, policies and expectations. They are supposed to be rational actors, in other words, 'blinded' only by common national prejudices and perceptions ('our' interests vs 'theirs'), but not by any kind of cultural exceptionalism within the boundaries of the state as distinct from the nation/the people. However, it is precisely such culturally bounded exceptionalism that constitutes state cultures, which - although they do possess a number of universal characteristics - are more obviously typified by historically and structurally specific configurations in different nation-states. The following is a brief outline of those configurations (including interactions between 'state' and 'political' cultural features) in three core European countries.

## **II. State Cultures and Political Cultures in the UK, France and Germany**

The three case-studies have been selected for a variety of reasons: the three states are major political players on the European stage and have been so for centuries; they determine to a large extent, in various configurations of power and interest, the processes of European integration and/or fragmentation; they evince different historical and contemporary forms of modernization, state culture, elite/mass-interaction, collective memories, political nationalism, and state symbolism. But there are also interesting points of comparison and similarity. The order follows a set of assumptions according to which the UK represents the

least ‘Weberian’ and the most strongly ‘premodern/traditional’ state culture, Germany on the contrary the most ‘rationalistic’ and ‘modernizing’, with France located in between these two (possibly only apparent) extremes. Thus the three cases presumably evince not just three different configurations of single-state cultures (and their interaction with abstract, impersonal legalism), but also three different bases/models for informal networking and consequently three different ways of influencing and tapping into the EU system of informal decision-making.

### United Kingdom

It is a well-known fact that the UK has no written constitution and that the country’s brand of democracy is relatively far removed from formalistic, rule-determined and objectivistic decision-making procedures and, conversely, deeply steeped in the semi-aristocratic elitism and informal interactionism of the Old Boys Network (as well as other, possibly much more influential networks and practices).<sup>5</sup> As Vivien Schmidt has put it, ‘The British have long prided themselves on their civility, that is, their ability to work out problems informally following long-established and long-accepted, but never formalized rules’.<sup>6</sup> In fact, any strict interpretation of democratic practices would, even today under New Labour, sit rather uneasily with this British inclination (and its attendant practices) to favour traditional political culture of a paternalistic kind, gentleman’s agreements, muddling-through, common law, and a host of meanings, practices and discourses connected with the national past and the ‘continuous’ history of this ‘green and pleasant land’. In Walter Bagehot’s terms,<sup>7</sup> the ‘dignified’ components of British state culture still in large measure pre- and co-determine its ‘efficient’ parts, and the British political notion of efficiency in turn is relatively decoupled from impartialistic and Weberian concepts of fair-minded, accountable and formalized interaction and decision-making. As the political system’s preference for majoritarian rule and the first-past-the-post electoral system indicate, for British state culture pragmatic efficiency and centralized rule, firmly in the hands of elites socialized for this task and entrusted with the affairs of the general public, is more important than the formalities and abstract principles of representative democracy of a supposedly more continental kind (if this is in fact so remains to be seen - cf the analyses below of France and Germany).

In this sense - and although it constitutes a somewhat crude picture - British state culture is half-heartedly modern, heavily elitist, and quasi-democratic as well. It has never

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5 For a thoughtful and comprehensive perspective on power, networking and governance, see Martin J. Smith, *The Core Executive in Britain*, Houndmills, 1999.

6 ‘Democracy and Discourse in an Integrating Europe and a Globalizing World’, paper (unpaginated) prepared for the American Political Science Association National Meetings, Boston, September 3-6, 1998.

7 *The English Constitution*, London, 1867.

totally managed, nor sincerely wanted, to liberate itself from the subjectivities, arbitrariness and personality-dependent forms of interaction, negotiation and decision-making of the premodern, pre-democratic, semi-feudal colonial era, from the informal practices of networking of preordained political and bureaucratic elites - who are civil(ized) rather than objective, commonsensical rather than abstract, paternalistically authoritarian rather than egalitarian, and pragmatic rather than legalistic. (The terms used here are to be understood in descriptive, not normative senses.) In spite of much discussion and debate in Britain about the need to introduce a written constitution and continental state practices, and despite the fact that New Labour has stripped the aristocracy of some of its formal trappings of power and has allegedly Europeanized and modernized 'Cool Britannia', the old culture (including the sociological composition of political elites and its baggage of tacit knowledge) and traditional ways of 'doing business' still remain intact - though in updated guises - in the corridors of Westminster.

British state culture in many ways would seem to be appropriately described as 'postcolonial': after colonialism proper, but still possessing many of the attitudes, formal properties and ambitions of a colonial/global power - closed-circle networking, informal interaction, moralizing approaches to power, commonsense notions of the world, and strong attachments to traditionalism and ritualism in the conduct of public affairs. And in spite of modernizing drives, the framework remains almost identical: Britain still has no Constitution, still conducts its legal affairs based on case law rather than principles and abstract rights, still retains its elitist educational institutions, still recognizes worthy citizens by coopting them into a ramified system of honours, privileges and knighthoods, still celebrates the figure of the wise, charismatic and authoritarian (though humane) political leader, and is still romantically attached to the notion of royalty and all its trappings.

In this sense, British (or possibly more correct: English) state culture is 'monarchical' rather than 'republican', and 'backward-' rather than 'forward-looking': steeped in the ritualism and symbolics of semi-feudal pomp and circumstance as the cultural, unifying identity of a nation celebrating its continuous, relatively unruptured and relatively successful history. In this sense, the ideal notion of 'state' underlying state culture in Britain is one of a strong, trustworthy, centralized and dignified entity ensuring the functioning of a stratified social basis by means of agents specifically socialized for and dedicated to 'public service'. On the one hand, the state is highly institutionalized - but the institutional structure reveals remnants and legacies of pre-modern notions of power and authority. On the other, politics and its bureaucracy are highly personalized, as are attendant forms of political interaction, of political (dis)trust, and the culture of political debates. In between these two lies a terrain of moral worldviews and discourses of political behaviour steeped in 'decency' and 'fairness'. However, although the ideal-type state formation is conceived as strong, it is also traditionally imagined as limited: the prototypical British state is liberal, laissez-faire oriented, globalist,

and non-interventionist, and its culture in its 'ideal' form consequently both pragmatic (commonsense evaluations of the world based on discretion rather than rule) and hermetic (interaction of peers on the basis of acquaintance and shared values).

It is not a state culture without inherent tensions and ambiguities, however. The modernity of nation-states and rational bureaucracy has not left the British state culture and structure untouched - in fact, the 'premodernity' of its 'ways of doing things' is firmly circumscribed by and embedded into the assumptions and requirements of modernity. Muddling-through has been constrained both by the ideological antics of Margaret Thatcher and the modernizing and Europeanizing rhetoric of Tony Blair. Oxbridge credentials have been rivalled by degrees from less pompous, less classical institutions of higher learning. Devolution has challenged the omnipotence of the Westminster system. And the monarchy is hardly as popular as it used to be. Nevertheless, none of all this has fundamentally changed the complexity of British political or state culture, which has never been alien to institutions, in spite of its code of informal networking and boy-scout honour. Thatcher, in a way, broke away from the past, but only in the name of the past and while fully exploiting the charisma and authority of the prime ministerial office and the informalities of the British power system (again, see Smith, *op.cit.*). Universities other than Oxford and Cambridge in large measure use the old venerable institutions as their prime point of reference and comparison and aspire toward the same status while honouring much the same code of conduct. And though the Monarchy has received a few blows to its reputation, the ideal notion of a benign sovereign unifying the best qualities of the nation is intact both in the population and among political elites (the circumstances surrounding Princess Diana's death testified to this fact). In a certain perverse sense, it could be argued that in the British case we are confronted with an example of that apparent impossibility, the historical institutionalization of informality and secrecy, as the backbone of British state culture. Informal networking and historically resilient institutions have entered into a symbiotic, syncretistic relationship, which (based on a tacit agreement on moral and civic rules of the game) guarantees the survival and survivability of a unique British 'system' of elite interaction, elite values and decision-making procedures. Hence everyone in a sense knows about the anti-Weberian qualities of this system - the secretiveness and hermeticism of the system are out in the open, for everyone to see, so to speak, and are often hailed as positive characteristics of British state culture (though not as often as formerly) - partly undoubtedly because it has proved itself in situations of national emergency, like WWII (Churchill) and the all but total economic and moral collapse of the 70s (Thatcher). (In fact, the 'public discourse' corollary of a state culture of informal networking in Britain is a discourse of war, crisis, heroism, emergency, and sacrifice, and of staving off enemies and threats.) And hence, corrupt dealings in the usual sense of the term rarely make 'scandal' headlines in the UK, whereas sexually deviant and publicly defamed behaviour of top-notch politicians, which does not live up to the moral standards on which the

public acceptance of political secretiveness and closed-circle networking rests, does.

This semi-modern 'system' of institutionalized informality at the level of state culture not only springs from the practices and consequences of British colonialism and imperialism, but has always enacted itself in the purest possible form in the foreign-policy domain, where British politics has turned into statecraft, where the rulebook has never been formalized, where on the other hand the Official Secrets Act formally ensures the hermetic quality of negotiations and decisions, where historical successes have been reaped, and where Britain's global agenda-setting ambitions, including the 'special relationship' with the USA, have been liberally cultivated in a spirit of moral 'third forcism'. The main problem for British state culture has been the EU. As Vivien Schmidt has remarked in the article already cited, 'What is most problematic for collective identity within [the British] context, however, is the formalization of what had been informal before, and thus the increasing legalization in areas that had traditionally been more the domain of 'gentlemen's agreements' and informal arrangements' (1998). What the exact nature of the problem is, on the other hand, and how deep-rooted it is, is worth considering in some detail (pending further investigation), since the British state and its representatives have a long tradition of dealing with other cultural and political systems. A few brief and hypothetical observations will have to suffice in this context.

1. The culture of the EU institutions is French (see the next sub-section) and has not been determined by Britain from the outset. However, this culture is also informal - and most likely it is the specific informalities and networking contacts of this system rather than its formal properties that present problems, both of an 'attitudinal' and 'organizational' nature. In addition, French administrative culture no longer holds the same kind of sway in the EU as it used to. The English language and Anglo-American 'ways of doing things', on the other hand, are gaining ground.

2. The (degree of) institutionalization is a minor problem, if any at all - as testified by the ease with which the UK implements EU law - if it wants to. But of course procedures of internal (not democratic) accountability and control, and particularly Qualified Majority Voting and the like, threaten the traditional British 'organic' interaction between assumptions of absolute, sovereign power, informal state culture, and direct influence on social and economic affairs.

3. On the other hand, the EU as such operates to a large degree on the basis of informal decision-making, lobbyism, interpersonal networks, behind-the-scenes negotiations, armtwisting and horsedealing, etc. All of this at a certain level of abstraction is perfectly in sync with British state-cultural assumptions and traditions, and reportedly Brits assimilate very easily into and take advantage of this system, because its 'postmodern', Americanized properties fit nicely with the semi-modern configuration of the British state culture *per se*.

The likely conclusion is that the EU system of values, assumptions and networking is

a mixed blessing for Britain - not in itself all too problematic for its legalistic and institutionalized qualities, but more so because it has French culture and dominance stamped all over it in terms of procedures, personnel and historical dominance, and German substance and form in terms of institutional structure and policy objectives. All in all British problems stem from the history of having been left out/choosing to stay out of the European formative process from its inception in the 1950s - and from the minor clash between being part of Europe and wanting to remain 'global' and closely attached to the USA - but not from any discrepancy between the networking culture of the UK and that of the EU.

### France

It has already been intimated that French state culture at the level of informality, networking and Europeanization is both akin to and quite different from the English. At a superficial level, and listing only a few signifying pointers, such ambiguous relations spring from a number of historical and institutionalized features of the French state and the French polity.<sup>8</sup> Like the British, it is/used to be a colonial, imperial state, but its way of conducting colonial domination and administration was far more centralized, homogenizing and culturally Francophone than its opposite number across the Channel. Its terrain and channels of elite recruitment have always consisted of a set of state-funded, highly selective institutions, *les Grandes Ecoles*, which unlike Oxbridge in the UK long ago received the official state stamp of recognition; consequently, a background in and certificates from these institutions of administrative and technological excellence are a well-nigh formal and inescapable requirement for high-ranking jobs in the French civil service and in politics as well. Elitism is thus institutionalized, even more rigidly than in Britain, but in a normative context of equality (access to elite institutions is determined through impartiality rather than cultural and class-based privilege) and based on a presumptive context of administrative, rule-bound and 'modern' conduct of the affairs of state. Like Britain, however, and to some extent for similar reasons, French state culture - rooted in a long tradition of paternalistic centralization, executive and administrative autonomy, presidential *grandeur*, and economic *dirigisme* - is nevertheless pervaded by a practice and a morality of elite networking, informal decision-making, and a widespread and deeply-rooted *esprit de corps*.

Thus, French state culture compares oddly with the British: On the one hand it not only presumes to be strong, but (at least until recently) to be omnipotent. This was never a state that saw itself as limited, but as actively involved in and proactively directing not just political but also economic affairs - hence the French model of economic interventionism and control, shaped on a number of largish state-owned enterprises. In this sense, French state culture invites informal, closed-circle networking, autocracy, ritualistic interaction and high-

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8 Cf William Safran, *The French Polity*, (4th Edition), White Plains, NY, 1995.

minded rhetoric, and some measure of ‘absolutist’ rule. On the other, it is a more ‘modern’, more ‘Weberian’ state culture, based on a written constitution (though it has had a tendency to change from one Republic to the next), committed to equality of opportunity, social solidarity, (more or less) direct democratic rule (Jacobinism), administrative rigour in accordance with the Napoleonic Code, and universalistic, republican values - with all of this steeped in the ideals of the French Revolution, its historical breach with the past, and its explicit commitment to political modernity (including the abolition of monarchical rule and the relegation to political and cultural significance of the aristocracy) - something that Britain has never experienced.

In this sense, the French state project and its attendant culture have, for the last two hundred years or so, been a project and a culture of modernity, equality, solidarity, rationality, democracy, and human rights. It has been universalistic, and it has been a culture of popular representativeness - the people’s voice, interests and desires having been directly present at the level of state. It is in this context and on these presumptions that the French *état-nation* is often seen to be the embodiment of the ideal-type Western, civic, reasoned, Weberian nation-state, based on citizenship principles of *ius soli*. On the other hand, it has just as consistently been a culture of exceptionalism, elitism, paternalism, privilege, and discourses and self-images of a ‘l’État, c’est moi’ nature. From this standpoint the French nation-state modality appears as one of an inward-looking and rather self-congratulatory discourse about coalescence of state, culture, language, territory and identity - and it is this ethnic and potentially racist modality that the New Right in France, LePen’ism, thrives on and reinvents in an anti-immigrant context.

The notion of France of General de Gaulle tried, successfully, to build a bridge of consensus and direct representation between the two cultural legacies (pride and modernity, exceptionalism and universalism), but at the expense of the intermediate, ‘party’ level of democracy, and hence also at the expense of *l’Assemblée Nationale* and in a certain sense of a moderate and reasoned public debating climate as well. You were either for or against the General, whose communicative strategies, both in the public arena and in the corridors of power, were directive and monological rather than pragmatic and dialogical. Thus, de Gaulle and his Gaullism overcame the historical weakness and changeability of the French party landscape (in large degree responsible for the failures and indecisiveness of the Fourth Republic) and therefore of this dimension of French state culture by effectively short-circuiting it, building instead a strong and charismatic presidency with extensive real and discursive power, pivoting around a cult of a presidential personality directly accountable to the people, and thus welding together the real and formal attributes of state power.

In this way, de Gaulle - for a time - managed to reconcile some of the most intractable ambiguities and paradoxes of political democracy in France, which ever since the Revolution had fluctuated between centralized, reactionary, almost absolute power ambitions and the

direct democracy of Jacobinism. His intentions were no doubt those of a visionary modernizer, wanting to place France in a central European position, to modernize the economy, and to overcome the burdensome legacy of colonialism. But the instruments were in large measure autocratic, centralizing, and, in the absence of party-political support or a strong *cabinet*, heavily dependent on the loyalty and technical/administrative competence of the French civil service.

Gaullism strengthened the technocratic, hermetic, absolutist element of French state culture, while the construction of a charismatic, omnipotent presidency - to a large extent rooted in de Gaulle's military experience/record and exceptionalist discourse of French history and state identity - gave a boost to (perceptions of) arrogance, elitism and privilege as dominant mainstays of French state culture. These peculiarities imply that de Gaulle reproduced the special French interface between on the one hand a modern, but distinctly French form of constitutionally based, technocratic and institutionalized statecraft, and on the other a highly personalized and subjectivist polity culture - but he did so as a modernizer while discursively tapping into the French legacy of republican values, imperial grandeur, the *mission civilisatrice*, national pride, European centrality, and absolutist statecraft. The normative foundation was always the desirability of a strong, independent, and self-confident state, admired abroad and dominant domestically. At the same time Gaullism reinforced (some would say created) the technocratic centrality of the state by means of its *dirigiste* instruments and policies of economic planning, especially through its use of pivotal state-owned enterprises and the attendant forms of a particularly French version of neo-corporatism and intra-state networking among elites in politics, business and the civil service (a configuration which much more readily than the British lends itself to the forms of corruption in French political life which have received so much attention recently).

In foreign policy matters, de Gaulle also attempted to toe the line between on the one hand French exceptionalism and imperial grandeur and on the other hand a commitment to European, albeit intergovernmental and preferably French-led integration. Predecessors Jean Monnet and Robert Schumann each in their own way represented the two significant strands of French state culture which from the outset left a deep imprint on the administrative culture of the EU: That of state-economic planning and 'political technocracy' of an 'ENA nature', and that of imperially-steeped, Europeanized and far-sighted French universalism of a homogeneous, cultural nature. These dimensions were the main ingredients in French attempts in the 50s and 60s to 'export' French state-cultural practices and their special blend of institutionalization and informal networking to the EU, thus securing a kind of procedural, administrative (and linguistic) domination for French foreign-policy interests over Germany. As we know, these objectives were in large measure successful, but also entailed a number of contradictions and, subsequently, problems for France in the EU - problems that started to appear already in the 60s (the policy of the empty chair), as Germany's economic-political

clout increased and as intergovernmental cooperation became threatened by supranational and federalist tendencies.

The basis for these problems is that French state culture is closely tied to the French polity of centralized sovereignty, direct social intervention, and political-bureaucratic control of the implementation and enforcement dimensions of political measures. It can accommodate international collaboration and treaty arrangements, but only to the extent that the international/European regime is, first, indisputably (perceived to be) controlled by France and, second, does not veer too much in the direction of (formal, institutionalized) supranationality. As Europe has indeed done so in the course of the latter half of the 20th century, French administrative culture in the EU, having successfully provided the core model for political and bureaucratic interaction in EU institutions as well as for the structure of the same institutions, has increasingly tended to change its role from one of bolstering French political foreign-policy *grandeur* to one of being a (last-ditch?) replacement of the paramount French influence of earlier days. Or as Vivien Schmidt chooses to put it, 'Adjustment to institutional change has not been easy for France, where the philosophical justification for extensive executive autonomy and control has its origins in Jacobin notions of the role of the state as the direct representative of the people, to do its bidding without obligation to any other authority (including the historically dependent judiciary, the traditionally weak legislature, and the steadily centrally controlled periphery) by formulating policy without intermediation by other actors [...] and by implementing policy with administrative discretion' (op.cit.). She continues by arguing that 'institutional changes related to the EU as well as internal dynamics that have increased the independence of the judiciary have made governmental elites in particular uncomfortable with the greater judicial activism that undermines executive decision-making autonomy and threatens jail for some executives (business as well as governmental)', adding that 'the most problematic change for French democracy [...] has been the loss of administrative flexibility in implementation'.

French state culture vis-a-vis the EU is thus a double-headed monster. On the one hand, the institutional set-up, the administrative routines, communicative channels, linguistic forms, and modalities of informal networking in the EU have from the start been deeply influenced by French state culture and state personnel. On the other, these partly formal, partly informal structures, processes and properties over time have become wedded to objectives and decision-making forms that have increasingly tended to cut themselves loose from French political goals in the EU. Hence, they have become increasingly difficult to instrumentalize for the French state, since they presuppose a large measure of 'executive autonomy' in an intergovernmental setting where the French are successful in maintaining a knife-edge balance between national independence and European influence. The 70s effectively put a stop to any realistic hope for such an endeavour. Mitterrand's 'socialist experiment' in the early 80s was a desperate attempt to assert French political-economic

autonomy and the *dirigiste* model for economic governance in the face of international and European forces that had already effectively undermined it. Subsequently, Delors' period at the helm of the Commission and his campaign for a 'European identity' in this light can be reinterpreted as a renewed French endeavour to stamp its cultural mark on EU developments and to reassert the predominance of French elite culture in the EU institutions. The forms of networking, corporatist structures, kickbacks, clientilism and decision-making that this endeavour drew its sap from and promoted were in turn exposed by the downfall of the Santer Commission and attendant cases of corruption in the EU (revealing no doubt only the merest tip of the iceberg). In the wake of this a spate of similar cases within France, most notably the Dumas affair, have demonstrated the domestic cultural provenance of such forms of thinking and action, but has also made it clear that the EU, in spite of the fact that also there informal ways of interacting and decision-making are prevalent, possibly as a necessary feature of the system,<sup>9</sup> has the potential of making a deep impact on the state cultures of its member-states (see also the next section).

What this fact indicates, among other things, is that state cultures are intimately tied (functionally and causally) to the historical and political particularities of sovereign states, and cannot simply be dissociated from them, instrumentalized in other contexts, without undergoing changes of purposiveness, design and outcome. In other words, the specifics of the interaction between rationality and informality, institutions and networking in France and in the EU are different and cannot be reduced to the same formula of understanding and analysis. The interface between the two may even result in apparently perverse outcomes, the configuration of 'informality' in one setting (the EU) prompting increased 'rationality', accountability and democratic scrutiny in others. France is one example of this process - Germany, as we shall now see, another.

### Germany

At the beginning of this section it was argued that Germany can be seen as representing the most Weberian (and by implication the most rationalistic and democratic, and the least 'informal' and hermetic) of the three state cultures being surveyed here. In two significant senses this is true - but in others it is a hypothesis in need of serious modification, based on a realization that German state culture, like much of German history, political ambition and policy-making process, is not just a mix of traditional, charismatic and modern components, but is furthermore riddled with paradoxes and contradictions.

The first point where the epithet 'Weberian' holds good relates to the particular German dualism between the administrative and the political state 'systems' and the attendant concept of 'Rechtstaatlichkeit'. As Wolfgang Seibel has correctly pointed out, unlike the

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<sup>9</sup> See Adrienne Héritier, *Policy-Making and Diversity in Europe*, Cambridge, 1999.

historically volatile German political and constitutional system, which does ‘not designate parliamentary law as supreme, but rather highlights the need to modernize the administrative apparatus’, this very ‘administrative system has survived every change of government since the time of the Congress of Vienna’ and has ‘come to represent all that is dependable in state institutions’.<sup>10</sup> This is because the administrative system was modernized and systematized far earlier than the political, which did not become truly democratic until after WW II (and even then not on the basis of domestic social and economic developments, but rooted in external conditionalities following yet another military defeat). Hence, as Seibel argues, ‘The continuity of the notion of *Rechtsstaat*, a term equivalent now with “democracy”, represents for the Germans the one reliable doctrine of government, although it is an institution that precedes democracy’ (ibid., p. 93). For the same reasons, the German civil service displays a high degree of efficiency, reliability, professionalism, and rule-determined practices. Its *esprit de corps*, cultural assumptions and professional identity do not allow for informal networking, personal favours, arbitrary decision-making, let alone clientilism or corrupt practices. Although pre-democratic by origin (in fact it owes a heavy debt to the military efficiency of Bismarck’s administration), it has historically compensated for the democratic ‘*Verspätung*’ of the political system and even today works as a moderating factor for a state culture and a ‘political class’ of *de facto* elitism, autocracy and insulation from the ordinary citizen (although this insulation is often legitimated by reference to the need to respect and uphold democracy and its institutions - see further below).

The second area where the rationalistic assumption is valid has to do with Germany’s constitutional structure/values and its efforts to modernize and democratically legitimate its political system and state culture after WWII. In spite of the fact that, as mentioned, democracy was a structure imposed on Germany by the West, German politicians like Heuss, Schumacher, Adenauer and Brandt seriously tried to overcome Nazism and to effect a transition to an internationally respected republican democracy whose political practices were firmly rooted in constitutional structures and values. They carefully nurtured the image of Germany as a modern, European, international, peace-loving and tolerant state, including a modernized party and election system, a checks-and-balance system between the federal and the *Land* levels of governance, *sozialstaatliche* institutions and welfare provisions in addition to law-and-order within the *rechtsstaatliche* tradition, a regulated system of *Sozialpartnerschaft* between state actors and prominent social interests organizations, and generally a discourse of rationality, morality and legality as principal lodestars of state teleology and state culture. These are the values and principles celebrated by the notion of *Verfassungspatriotismus* as the ideal rock bottom on which the Federal Republic was created, which German politicians (as well as Germans more broadly) ought to live and act by, but have, according to

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10 ‘Corruption in the Federal Republic of Germany before and in the wake of reunification’, in Donatella Della Porta & Yves Mény, eds, op.cit., 1997, p. 92.

Habermas-inspired proponents of constitutional patriotism, abandoned in favour of *Realpolitik*, corruption and self-serving practices, subservience to powerful business groups, narrow national interests, European and multilateral high-politics decision-making, and a lack of concern for the principles of 'bottom-up' democracy.

The implication of this very real critique (the core of which can be accepted without sharing its normative foundation) is that German state culture, though apparently rationalistic and formal in most of its workings, and with no grounding in institutionalized informalities of elite socialization like in France and the UK, contains a highly significant layer of informal policy-making. Superimposed on top of the professionalized efficiency of the state administration and concealed within the political discourse of a modernized and moderate state intent on effecting the most optimal *Interessenausgleich* possible in the name of the *Allgemeinwohl*, we find the present-day traces of the statism and *Obrigkeitsstaatlichkeit* of the Wilhelmine and Nazi eras, the culture of the strong and charismatic *Macher* (Adenauer, Brandt, Schmidt, Kohl...), a fragmented and contradictory democratic tradition, widespread instances of political nepotism and corruption (from the Spiegel Affair in the 60s, over the Flick Affair in the 70s and 80s, to the Kohl Affair of the 90s), and, not least, a citizenry rather fatalistically observing and accepting such wheelings and dealings by the actors of the political scene.

This is a democracy which explicitly - by legitimating reference to the Weimar and the Nazi periods and in the name of democracy - wishes to guard itself against the wiles and volatility of the electorate and in this sense produces a significant degree of insulation between state elites (in Germany tellingly and uniformly referred to as 'the Political Class') and a people which, as Seibel points out, possesses no historically entrenched yardstick by which to judge normal political behaviour and standard rules of the game (op.cit., p. 92). For the same reason, even cases of informal decision-making and dubious practices that *are* uncovered and meet with public disapproval only rarely and haphazardly have any consequences for political careers and tend to recede into the nooks and crannies of public oblivion much more quickly than in other countries (for instance, the 'Kohl Affair' is rarely seen in the light of the 'Flick Affair' of the early 80s, which not just did not have serious consequences for the later *Kanzler*, but involved Helmut Kohl in dealings that appear similar, almost identical to those that might have sent him to jail in the present case - had he not struck a deal with the public prosecutor and ended up with a fine).

This peculiarity is rooted in a specifically German relationship between a political discourse of democracy, legality and openness (a discourse largely accepted by citizens as characteristics of German political culture, at least at the level of ideal and ambition) and a state culture of political interaction extensively based on informal networking, low levels of regard for public opinion and a correspondingly high degree of *de facto* elitism and power autocracy. But these are elites which, unlike e.g. France, carefully nurture a public image of

anti-elitism, lack of privilege, conscientious devotion to public duty, impartiality, and the utmost respect for the formal dimensions of democracy and constitutional values. This is also the way the general public wants to perceive political actors. Hence, cases of ‘misconduct’, rule-bending and informal decision-making are usually seen as exceptional and either quickly recede from public memory and/or are blamed on externalities such as the undemocratic influence of the European policy regime. The interaction between ideal discourse and state culture is underpinned by the fact that in Germany there is no formally recognized, overt, preordained elite education or elite institutional structure, no historically embedded ‘institutionalization’ of informality and networking - apart from the different dimensions of the political system itself: the high threshold (5%) which parties have to overcome in order to be represented in the *Bundestag*, the constitutional ban on referenda, the cavalier attitude of the German system toward ministers as non-members of Parliament, and particularly the socializing and gatekeeper roles of the German party organizations (it is no coincidence that a majority of the cases of unfair dealings that have historically been exposed have been related to politicians having solicited illegal private contributions to their parties and not (solely) to themselves). These are but a few examples of the way in which Germany formalizes informality and contributes toward the creation of a state-cultural dimension above and beyond that of democratic accountability and *rechtsstaatliche* values, including the hermeticism and tacit knowledge base of informal networks (spanning both the world of politics and other societal interests).

I said above that the public largely accepts this state of affairs because it evaluates political actors through a set of lenses informed by a desire to trust the democratic, systemic and modern characteristics of the system of government, and to believe that the polity has effected a dramatic rupture with the authoritarian tendencies of the past - the Other of modern German culture and history. Nevertheless, acceptance is not wholesale, but is intermittently interrupted by spouts and even periods of disenchantment and *Politikerverdrossenheit*, and consequent attempts to salvage one’s idealism by separating the structural aspects of the system of government from the personal/cultural aspects of the behaviour of political figures (an evaluative separation corresponding to that between administrative and political systems, which in turn partly matches that between Federal and *Land* levels of governance). Politicians in turn try to counter this tendency through a mix of rational, argumentative discourse and the strong and charismatic leadership which the electorate, against their better judgment, demand and expect. Underlying this conundrum is the fact that, as Seibel articulates the problem, ‘the Anglo-Saxon notion of the ‘mandate’ as the expression of a temporary transfer of trust is foreign to [the] German understanding of democracy. Germans are more inclined to identify the political factor with politicians themselves...’ (op.cit., p. 92). Or in other words, forms and representations of charismatic authority have survived the ruptures of modern German history and to a significant extent, though rather insidiously, inform both the leadership values of

German citizens and the culture of interaction of the political leaders.

In this way German state culture reveals traces of a system of policy- and decision-making discursively geared towards gaining legitimacy and recognition in and by the world at large, but is also laid bare as a system having had little theoretical access to or practical experience with domestic historical precedents for democracy, accountability and representativity which might have been used or referred to as models. Ideal and reality, discourse and practice, high and low politics, administration and policy-making, constitutionalism and informality, systemic qualities and personal values are often crudely pitted against each other rather than being frictionlessly calibrated. Hence the German configuration of informality and institutionalization is almost qualitatively different from both the UK and France. In both the latter - though in different ways - informal decision-making, bolstered by history and tradition, is enveloped by somewhat premodern institutional structures, rituals and socializing agencies, and is condoned, if not jubilantly welcomed, by public opinion. In Germany, democracy is revered as an escape from a premodern past, and Weberian constitutionalism, division of powers, federalism and legality are seen as key features of the German polity. Nevertheless, as much or even more than in the other two states, informal networking and decision-making are rampant, the state is a cultural area all its own, and the state-cultural specifics cannot rely on being offset by a political culture of common sense and public duty anchored in local constituency (UK) or in the self-confidence that it gives to be the European origin of democratic principles, universal values and political representation (France). What Germany does have, on the other hand, is a vigorous, media-led, state-derived public debating culture, which to the extent that it is rooted in moral principles and the idealism of democratic discourse has the potential to set limits to the unfettered power execution of the political executive.

Thus German state culture is hardly as 'Weberian' as is often assumed - and to the extent that it is, the rationalism and objectivity of its 'ways of doing things' are rooted as much in administrative procedures that predate post-war democracy as in this democracy itself, which is still deeply marked by historical legacies of autocracy, statism and charismatic power execution. Unification of the two Germanys has apparently done little to improve on this self-sufficiency of state actors nor on the insulated character of the state *vis-a-vis* the people, though it did no doubt strengthen the discursive emphasis on West German democracy in contrast to Eastern despotism. In addition, the universal effect of globalization as regards the weakening of the nation/state bond and the 'depoliticization' of the National has, in Germany as in the other countries under review here, tended to boost state cultures, informal networking and 'unaccountable' decision-making rather than to weaken such phenomena.<sup>11</sup>

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11 This is a tendency which politicians do not unquestionably welcome, because it threatens both their democratic legitimacy and their national power base. See e.g. the conference of center-left government leaders

This pertains to the EU as well, though with a difference. Adrienne Héritier (op.cit.) has convincingly shown up some of the significant reasons and consequences for the strengthening of informal policy-making in the EU - as what she calls the 'escape from deadlock' by means of informal 'subterfuge' strategies, the deadlock consisting of the impossibility in the EU institutions of honouring a diverse set of democratic traditions and requirements in the different member-states without committing any progress down the road of integration to an early death. The fact, as argued here, that these traditions may in themselves be less democratic than normally assumed only makes the argument more valid. And it should be supplemented with the fact that the EU provides all national executives with a convenient scapegoat for unpopular decisions. On the other hand, the match between the single-country, state-cultural configuration of 'accountability process' and 'informal interaction' and that which characterizes the EU *eo ipso* may be more or less smooth, more or less direct. In Germany's case, the link is troubled: the modes of informality and institutionalization only cohere in a piecemeal fashion.

There is a match as regards the insulation of the sphere of politics from the 'lifeworld' of the ordinary citizen, as well as in the careful discursive orchestration that this barrier needs to be broken down in the name of democracy, subsidiarity or popular accountability. To some extent there is also a reasonable measure of convergence in regard to the emphasis on administrative reliability, on rule-bound process based on legality and objectivity - though the EU culture is more of French elitist-technocratic origin than rooted in German administrative *Rechtsstaatlichkeit* (but this is something that is most likely in the process of transformation). And this provides a pointer to where the main problem is located: the communicative and interactive culture of the EU bureaucracy is and has been primarily 'French', including the fact that French (and English because of its global standing) are the unofficial leading languages of the EU, while German still has to take the back seat to these two. Also the 'teleological codes' and historical rhetoric and discourse of EU integration are clearly more French than German. In brief, the cultural presumptions of elite interaction in the EU were 'born' in France. This primacy of French state culture was from the start of the EU not just accepted but even welcomed by Germany, as a convenient way to demonstrate German moderation, European disposition and willingness to suppress German culture and identity in favour of that of the main partner in the European venture. This state of affairs is no longer one that Germany seems ready to accept. Since Germany regained its 'normality',<sup>12</sup> the

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in Berlin described in the article 'Wider die Entmachtung der Politik' (*Deutschland*, no. 4/2000), a conference entitled 'Progressive Governance for the XXI Century', convened by Gerhard Schröder to discuss the 'opportunities and dangers of globalization' with a view to 'combating poverty' and 'strengthening civil society'.

12 See Ulf Hedetoft, *The Global Turn: National Encounters with the World*, Aalborg University Press, 2003, chapter 6.

German position clearly is that German language, culture and identity should be legitimately allowed to make a proportional imprint on the workings of the EU administrative and political system.