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## ► To cite this version:

Renaud Dehousse, Andrew Thompson. The Commission in the EU Institutional System: A Citadel Under Siege. 2012. hal-01070279

**HAL Id: hal-01070279**

**<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-01070279>**

Preprint submitted on 1 Oct 2014

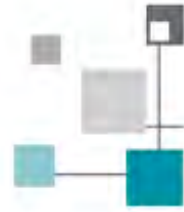
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## **The Commission in the EU Institutional System: A Citadel Under Siege**

**> Renaud Dehousse  
and Andrew Thompson**

forthcoming in H. Kassim et al., *The Commission of the 21st Century*,  
Oxford University press, 2012

A common view of administrations is that they are eager to expand their influence by resorting to a wide range of tools, ranging from technical expertise to the budget (Niskanen, 1971). The Commission is no exception to the rule: it is often described in the press or by politicians as a bunch of power-hungry officials – ‘*technocrates européistes*’ in the words of former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine (Le Monde, 29 June 2010); “self-serving bureaucracy” in those of German center-right MEP Ingeborg Gräßle (European Voice, 29 July 2010), and there is no shortage of works in the scholarly literature to describe it as a ‘utility maximizer’ eager to expand its influence (Pollack 2003), a ‘purposeful opportunist’ trying to draw maximum benefit of its often limited powers (Cram, 1993, Héritier, 1999), or to criticize the continuous erosion of national powers it is conducting as a form of ‘integration by stealth’, undesired either by its political principals (the member states) or by citizens (Majone, 2005).

It is fair to say that the Commission has at its disposal a wider range of resources than the secretariat of most international organizations. The treaty invites it to act independently from external pressures; so does its official institutional ideology, the ‘Community method’ (CM), designed by the founders of the EU (Dehousse, 2011). Its broad formal powers include a near-monopoly of legislative initiative and the discretionary power to bring about infringement proceedings against member states that fail to comply with EU law – two important prerogatives in their own right that, when skilfully combined, enable it to play a leading role in legislative procedures (Schmidt, 2011). Unlike the Council, its members (in the college and in the services) are working full-time on European issues, and it is better equipped than either the Council or the Parliament to have a cross-cutting view on the wide range of policies conducted or affected by the Union. Last but not least, given the limited development of party politics at the European level, it is also less bothered than its domestic

counterparts by purely political considerations. This explains why the Community method has always been defended by the Commission leadership. Even President Barroso, often suspected of revisionist leanings, systematically pays lip service to it. Reacting to the multiplication of French and German unilateral initiatives during the financial crisis, he notably stressed that the best guarantee for "preserving the coherence" of EU action was the Community method, involving the European Commission as the guardian of the EU Treaties to prevent possible divisions (Barroso, 2011).

In this chapter, we assess what is left of the Community method “myth” (Dimitrakopoulos, 2010) in the beliefs of Commission officials, after nearly two decades of an evolution characterized by a number of powerful challenges to the latter’s authority. In contrast with chapter 3, we do not purport to provide the reader with an overall map of official’s beliefs, but merely to analyze whether officials are still inspired by the classical view of their institution’s role, and how they envisage its relationships with other institutions and actors. We begin by recalling the main changes that have taken place in the governance of the EU in the period following the Maastricht Treaty (1992), as this forms the background against which we must assess officials’ current views. We then analyze how large support for the Community method is in today’s Commission, and discuss a number of factors that might affect it. Finally, we examine CM supporters’ views on the evolution of the EU institutional system.

## **1. THE POST-MAASTRICHT ENVIRONMENT**

From the Maastricht Treaty on, the European Commission, which was long regarded as the main engine of integration, has lost substantial ground. Even though its formal powers

have not been curtailed, its authority has been challenged in various ways. From the beginning of the 1990s on, the level of support has collapsed; opinion polls have unanimously confirmed the fact that the 'permissive consensus' that enabled the European venture to be launched is now nothing but a memory (Hooghe and Marks, 2009) . Around the same time, the national governments began to show signs of growing impatience with what they saw as an unlimited increase in the powers of the EU, and therefore of the Commission. Counterweights of all kind have mushroomed. The 'pillar structure' of the Maastricht treaty was undoubtedly the first expression of this new tendency: the member states accepted to undertake common actions in areas such as foreign policy, security and justice, areas that are traditionally the preserve of the state, but only at the cost of a reduction of the role of supranational institutions. Even in traditional areas of Community intervention such as the internal market, they have appeared reluctant to strengthen the Community structure, which has led to the setting up of multiple autonomous bodies. Today, over thirty administrative agencies liaise between the Commission and the national governments, in areas ranging from the fight against drug addiction, food security and health and safety in the workplace. In other areas, the gap between the administrative tasks and the resources allocated to the Commission has resulted in the systematic use of subcontractors, which facilitated the fraud and mismanagement that brought about the downfall of the Santer Commission (Committee of Independent Experts, 1999). Typically, when functional needs for a stronger European impetus start to be felt, national governments systematically insist on responding through *ad hoc* structures, rather than entrusting the Commission with new tasks. Over the last two decades, we have been witnessing, *inter alia*, the creation of offices such as the High Representative for the CFSP, the presidency for the Eurogroup and the President of the European Council.. The Commission has been relegated to a secondary role while the heads of state and government assume an overall role of guidance and control.

In the meantime, the Commission has also faced growing pressure on the side of the European Parliament. To remedy the notorious ‘democratic deficit’ the European political system is said to suffer from, a strong dose of parliamentarianism has been injected at the European level; the European Parliament’s financial, legislative and supervisory powers have been strengthened. The Treaty of Lisbon describes it as a co-legislator, on the same footing with the Council, in most policy areas. Equally importantly, the Parliament has acquired considerable influence over the appointment of the Commission. To strengthen the links between the Parliament and the ‘executive’, it has been given the power to elect the Commission President and, although its ‘vote of approval’ concerns the college as a whole rather than individual commissioners, it has obtained the establishment of a hearing procedure inspired by the US experience, which has enabled it to influence the distribution of portfolios within the Commission and even its composition.

In general terms, the European Parliament’s rise in power has been achieved largely to the detriment of the Commission. The generalization of legislative co-decision and the parallel development of ‘early agreements’ (Shackleton, 2000; Héritier and Farrell, 2003) have constrained the latter’s ability to shape EU legislation resulting from its right of initiative, giving rise to concerns in some quarters of the Commission (Costa, Dehousse and Trakalová, 2011). The Parliament enjoyed decisive influence over some of the past legislature’s most controversial proposals, such as the services (or Bolkestein) directive or the REACH regulation (Crespy, 2010). In a wide range of areas, ranging from executive powers (comitology) to the negotiation of external agreements, the Commission has had to come to terms with a vocal partner, eager to secure a seat at the table. Its spending power is now subjected to a close scrutiny by the EP’s budget control committee.

In addition to those environmental transformations, the Commission's services have gone through major changes. The forced resignation of the Santer Commission in 1999, following allegations of mismanagement, has had a lasting impact on the institution. It has encouraged the development of a new role model, where the emphasis was no longer on the missionary role to be played by an administrative elite in charge of 'making Europe', but rather on its managerial role, in tune with the world fashion of 'new public management'. Successive reforms of administrative management (the Kinnock reforms) and of recruitment procedures, largely inspired by this new model, have been resented by insiders as externally imposed (Bauer, 2008; Georgakakis, 2010; see also chapter 8 ).

Put together, all these factors easily explain why the Commission is widely viewed as a power in decline (Kassim and Menon, 2003). This view finds a strong echo in our survey: 61.7 per cent of our respondents think that the EU has lost ground to national capitals, 58.7 per cent to the European Parliament; and a majority of them regards the Delors era as a kind of 'golden era' in which the Commission clearly was Europe's agenda-setter. But how do they react to these changes? On paper, two options seemed possible. Officials from the reformed Commission could try to adjust to the new setting and attempt to define a new role for themselves, or they could display a besieged citadel's attitude, made of attachment to the official dogma, nostalgia for a glorious past, and reluctance to accept the more modest role they are now proposed. As will be seen, both trends can be discerned, albeit to a different degree, among our respondents.

## 2. WHAT ROLE FOR THE COMMISSION?

No one will be surprised to find out that there is still wide support within the Commission for a vision of the EU in which it is supposed to be playing a key role, without being hindered too much by national governments or the EP. The survey shows that amongst our respondents there is strong (79 per cent) opposition to the idea that the member states' grip over decision-making should be tolerated and, notwithstanding the widespread supremacy of the parliamentary democracy model in Europe, a sizable majority (57.8 per cent) is of the opinion that the European Parliament should not be given a right of legislative initiative. When it comes to the Commission's own place in the EU system, the classical view of the Commission's policy-making role still holds firmly. While just over half accept that policy management and coordination occupy a growing place in the institutions' task, an overwhelming majority (79.8 per cent, with over 40 per cent holding the view strongly) declare themselves opposed to the idea that it should primarily focus on managerial duties. Nearly two thirds are even convinced that the Commission's role as policy initiator is gaining more importance as a result of enlargement.

The combination of all these elements might be read as a confirmation of a wide support for the good old Community method, in which the Commission has to pull the ropes of EU policy-making by bridging the gap between the rival interests of national governments and the opposed viewpoints of the Council and the Parliament. At the same time, the dominant view seems to be that the Commission should act as honest broker rather than as a hegemon. There is a clear recognition that the Commission should not aspire to unrivalled supremacy in the Union, since a relative majority of the respondents who had an opinion (42.6 per cent) declare themselves opposed to the idea that it might aspire to become the government of the EU. If



one were to stop here, one could easily believe that the average Commission official's conception of their own role has not been dramatically affected by the post-Maastricht developments. Yet reality is much more multifaceted than this rapid overview of the data suggests. Firstly, as chapter 4 has shown, there is a fair degree of diversity in officials' images of Europe and of their own role. Even though support for a classical view of the Commission's role remains strong, it coexists with alternative perspectives, be they state-centric or openly federalist/supranationalist (Hooghe, 2010). Secondly, one may wonder how cohesive the group of supporters of the Community method actually is, and to what extent it may differ from officials who do not adhere to the classical vision of the Commission.

To answer these questions, we defined on the basis of the above data an 'ideal-type' derived from the main tenets of the 'Community method' doctrine: the faithful disciple is expected to believe that the Commission is something more than the secretariat of most international institutions, who are traditionally confined to narrowly defined tasks; in the EU context it is expected to be the main agenda-setter, rather than the member states or the Parliament. One could have opted for a more elaborate definition of the Community method, we deliberately decided to stick to a fairly minimalist acceptance for two reasons. First, despite the Commission's efforts to 'codify' the basic tenets of the doctrine, e.g. in its White Paper on governance (Commission, 2001), there is no commonly received understanding of the concept. Second, adopting a broad definition allowed us to examine how much support some ideas, such as the view of the Commission as a would-be 'government of Europe', enjoy in the CM camp. Adherence to the Community method was therefore defined using responses to a question on officials' views of EU governance, and singling out two criteria: disagreement with the idea that "member states – not the Commission or European Parliament – should be the central players in the European Union" and with the view

according to which “the Commission should primarily focus on managing existing policies, rather than developing new ones”. As a result, our CM supporters are less prone to centralization than the ‘supranationalist’ camp identified by Liesbet Hooghe in chapter . Interestingly, the data revealed a strong endorsement of the Community method, so defined, among Commission officials: a large number of our respondents (61.7 per cent, 1139 persons) adhere to the criteria we had set.

### **3. WHO (STILL) BELIEVES IN THE COMMUNITY METHOD?**

Beyond the size of the pro-Community method party, it is interesting to know who its members are and what are the factors that may shape their view of the Commission’s role. The scholarly literature suggests that two paths in particular were worth being explored. Firstly, it has been shown that officials’ views on EU governance are generally influenced by their national background (Hooghe 2001). One could, for instance, imagine officials from the founding countries, immersed in EU policy-making for over half a century, to be more favourable to the Community method than newcomers from the countries that joined in 2004 or later. Similarly, with the Community method having been largely conceived to protect the rights of smaller countries from undue pressure from their larger partners, one would expect this cleavage to affect officials’ beliefs. Past professional experience could also be relevant in at least two ways. Given the official adherence of the Commission hierarchy to the Community method, one could expect from an acculturation effect that the longer an official’s career in the Commission would be, the more s/he would be inclined to be supportive. In contrast, those who have worked in a national administration prior to joining the EU

bureaucracy could be hypothesised to find it more difficult to support a system characterised by a clear transfer of authority to the supranational level.

Ideological factors are more difficult. From an economic philosophy standpoint, European integration can be looked at in radically opposed ways. On the one hand, one might expect support for a free market to positively influence support for the Community method, which has played a key role in the establishment of the single market; on the other, left of centre parties tend today to vest greater hopes in supranational regulation in order to compensate the erosion of states' regulatory powers. On the whole, therefore, we did not expect this variable to have a major influence on our findings. In contrast, it would seem natural for more socially libertarian officials to be "more comfortable with European identity" (Hooghe, 2010). Further insight on the ideological motivation behind officials' support for the Community Method can be expected to exist among those who joined the Commission due to their commitment to building Europe.

In looking at the evidence from the 62 per cent of our survey respondents who adhered to our definition of the Community Method, we can test the above hypotheses. Thus, the importance of nationality is partially borne out in our data (Figure 1), which show that the degree of support for the Community method may vary significantly according to the nationality of officials: it is significantly higher among Bulgarians than among Romanians, who, despite being regional neighbours entering the Commission at the same time, are at the extremes. Some well-established views are re-affirmed by the analysis: Italians, Greeks and Belgians tend to be more favourable to the Community Method than, say, the British or Swedes. We see there an echo of chapter 4's findings, in which "supranationalists" dominated in the former nationalities and "intergovernmentalists" in the latter.

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Figure 1 about here

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Making sense of these differences is difficult. Size does not appear to be a decisive factor: there are large and small states among the countries whose officials appear most supportive, as well as among more sceptical ones. There appears to be a grouping of Southern countries at the positive end, but to speak of a North-South cleavage would be far-fetched, given the degree of support recorded in Benelux countries or in Germany. In contrast, while new member countries appear in both groups, officials from the founding states, with the possible exception of the French, are much more likely to be CM supporters. On the whole, those from the ‘old’ EU-15 countries are more supportive of CM than those from the newer EU-12 accession countries by an average margin of 5.5 per cent<sup>i</sup>. This appears to confirm chapter 8’s findings, which have evidenced a greater adherence to the view that national governments should play a key role in the Union amongst officials from those newer countries. Yet one should not derive from this that the longer one has been a member of the club, the more one is inclined to accept its rules. When disaggregated by the various waves of accession, the results do not show any clear trend (Figure 2). While officials from the six founding states and Greece suggest above average support, the pattern of support is not significant and neither does it reveal a consistent decline over time, with some new members, such as Bulgaria and Romania, polarised within the same accession wave (2007).

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Figure 2 about here

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We also tried to identify to what extent people's experience in the Commission could affect their support for the Community method. To this end, we used three variables: the directorate general in which they are active, the length of their stay in the institution and their level of seniority. It is known that the Commission's role may vary greatly from one area to the other and it could be envisaged that this factor might influence officials' views of the world. Figure 3, however, reveals a high degree of homogeneity across the various Directorates General (DGs) within the Commission,<sup>ii</sup> with only the DG Information Society and Media (INFSO) showing significantly higher support than the overall average. Support for the CM appears highest in some generalist DGs, the activities of which span across the whole range of sectors in which the EU is active (Communication, Secretariat-general, Office for infrastructure and logistics), yet this appears contradicted by the lower than average attitude in the legal service, in Eurostat, or in the Office for Official Publications (OPOCE). Even when the Directorates are grouped into seven functional types (viz. spending, regulatory, internal, external, legislative, spending and regulatory, and spending and legislative), there is no noticeable difference between their relative support for the CM.<sup>iii</sup> It is, however, interesting to note that in the sectors in which legislative production has been high in the last decade (Grossman and Brouard, 2009), such as internal market, environment and justice, the mean of support is above average (65, 65 and 66 per cent, respectively). In contrast, it is below average in the Trade and Competition DGs, while the Commission enjoys important prerogatives in those two areas. However, the size of the confidence intervals, resulting from smaller samples within DGs, makes it difficult to identify a clear pattern of behaviour. Of course, the horizontal mobility encouraged by the Kinnock reforms is likely to weaken the possibility for DGs to retain a distinctive culture.

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Figure 3 about here

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Moving on to consider the second set of hypotheses concerning the professional experience of these officials, we have investigated the effect of seniority and length of service, as well as any prior experience of working in a national administration. In order to rule out the possible confounding effect of age, we have analysed individual age and the age cohort in relation to the level of CM support. As it turns out, there is no discernible relationship, either for age<sup>iv</sup> or age group.<sup>v</sup>

Probably as a result of the positive relationship between age and level of seniority,<sup>vi</sup> there is no discernible relationship between an official's current position and commitment to the CM,<sup>vii</sup> as can be seen in Figure 4. Similarly, length of service has no discernible relationship at all with support for the CM, whether considered in absolute years<sup>viii</sup> or in quartiles.<sup>ix</sup> To sum up, officials' experience in the Commission does not appear to influence significantly their perception of the institution's role.

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Figure 4 about here

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On the other hand, our data lend support to the idea that prior work in a national administration makes it less likely than an official will consider the upward transfer of authority to the supranational level in a positive fashion, although the relationship appears rather weak<sup>x</sup>. Supporters of CM were, on average, 4.7 per cent<sup>xi</sup> less likely to have had experience in national civil services than other officials. On the whole, therefore, our data appears to lend support to the view that officials' perspectives are more frequently shaped by their national origins than by their experience within the Commission (see above, chapter 4).

Our third set of hypotheses concern officials' economic and social/cultural ideology, as well as their commitment to integration as an ideal in its own right. The evidence from our survey is that CM supporters are less economically liberal than other officials on economic issues by 0.23 points on an 11-point scale,<sup>xii</sup> whilst acknowledging that both groups are marginally to the right of centre (in relation to point 5 on the scale) at 5.40 and 5.63, respectively (Figure 5). However, the heterogeneity of this belief reveals a very wide 95 per cent confidence interval for the difference of between 0.04 and 0.42 scale points.

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Figure 5 about here

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Turning to the social/cultural philosophical beliefs, we again find the CM supporters to be more socially liberal than other officials, in this case by a larger margin of 0.42 scale points,<sup>xiii</sup> with a 95 per cent confidence interval ranging from 0.18 to 0.66 points. On these issues Figure 6 shows both groups are clearly to the left of centre (in relation to point 5 on the scale) at 3.51 and 3.93, respectively. Thus, in relation to our original propositions, our

evidence would appear to refute the view that the CM supporters are more likely to be free marketers, while offering tentative support for the view that they value the regulatory powers of the Commission in compensating for the loss of such powers at national level. Nonetheless, as we suspected, this variable has not had a major influence on our findings. Our data does lend more support for the view that more socially libertarian officials are less concerned by the necessity to protect national interests.

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Figure 6 about here

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The commitment to Europe, as a reason for choosing a career in the Commission, reveals a stronger link with CM supporters (76.1 per cent) than the others (63.1 per cent), an excess of 13 per cent, with a 95 per cent confidence interval of between 8.7 per cent and 17.4 per cent. Interestingly, this initial motivation is largely unrelated to their ideological positions on the economic or socio-cultural issues.

By building these various possible explanations of why some officials do or do not support the Community Method into a multivariate analysis using multi-level linear modelling of individuals nested within countries, we are able to identify the key variables (see Table 1 in the Appendix).<sup>xiv</sup> It turns out that the organisational level (DG) does not add at all to the model, whether one looks at each DG individually or one tries to group them by type of activity. In contrast, country-level variables do indeed contribute to our understanding. The individual variables that provide most explanation are to do with values, in terms of philosophical beliefs, particularly socio-cultural ones<sup>xv</sup>, and a ‘commitment to building Europe’<sup>xvi</sup>. Those more to the left on economic and socio-cultural issues are more likely to



support the CM<sup>xvii</sup>, as are those who joined the Commission in order to build Europe, where the odds of CM support are almost doubled. At the country level, additional explanation is given by the proportion of protestants within the country, which reduces the support for the CM<sup>xviii</sup>, and the index of multi-level governance, where greater exposure to such structures increases CM support<sup>xix</sup>. In other words, it would appear that national experience of multi-level governance arrangements and the existence of a lower proportion of Protestantism are both contributory factors in the support for the CM. Here again, our findings largely echo those of chapter 4.

#### **4. HOW SPECIAL IS THE ‘COMMUNITY METHOD’ PARTY?**

Having established that the number of ‘faithful believers’ in the Community method was fairly high, as one could expect, we attempted to identify more clearly what membership in this group entails. Firstly, do supporters of the Community method hold different views from other officials on the evolution of the Union? What is their assessment of the impact of enlargement or that of the Kinnock reforms on the functioning of the institution? Secondly, what preferences do they have as regards the future of the EU? What is, according to them, the most desirable distribution of authority between the EU and its member states or between the institutions? In answering these and related questions, we now consider support for the CM as the independent variable to see how well it explains differences in attitude or belief.

##### ***A) The decline of the Commission***

First, we looked at the views of officials concerning the evolution of the Union. While as noted above our survey identified a clear disenchantment as regards the evolution of the

Commission's political power, it was clearly more pronounced among CM supporters (77.7 per cent) compared to other officials (64.8 per cent)<sup>xx</sup> (Figure 7). Both groups agree, with similar majorities of nearly 50 % (allowing for neutral opinions), that there is today a greater focus on policy management and coordination, rather than on policy conception. The main drain of power leakage is generally identified as being in the direction of the national capitals. Here again, CM supporters tend to be more radical : 65.9 per cent of them agree, compared to 53.6 per cent of the other officials<sup>xxi</sup> (Figure 7). The difference is smaller as regards the European Parliament: 60.5 per cent of CM supporter assess that the Commission has lost ground to the Parliament, an opinion shared by 55.2 per cent of the others<sup>xxii</sup> (Figure 7).

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Figure 7 about here

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What are the elements which are deemed to be linked to this negative assessment? We explored three types of possible sources of the Commission's weakening: enlargement, which has long been expected to complicate relations with the Council as well as the internal organization of the Commission; administrative reform, often described as imposed on the institution (Georgakakis 2010), and changes in the Commission leadership.

Our survey confirms that enlargement is regarded as a disruptive element by a majority of officials. There seems to be no major disagreement between the 'CM party' and the rest on this assessment. In both groups, about three quarters of the respondents agree that a 27 member college makes coordination more difficult, although the CM supporters express more positive endorsement<sup>xxiii</sup>. Likewise, there are no noticeable differences in opinion about the fact that enlargement weakened the *esprit de corps* within the Commission, held by 61 per

cent of officials<sup>xxiv</sup>, or that its consequences on officials' career development were not handled equitably, also held by a similar proportion.<sup>xxv</sup>

Concerning administrative reform, the situation is similar. On the whole, our respondents are fairly critical of what has been achieved, as will be shown in more detail in chapter 7. While they are fairly uncertain as regards the impact of recent reforms, only minorities appear convinced that they (23.3 per cent) or their unit (29.2 per cent) have become more efficient. Negative assessments tend to dominate: personnel management has not improved (49.7 per cent); resources are not better matched to policy priorities (48.0 per cent); almost two thirds of our respondents consider that the new tools have been applied in a formalistic way and over 70 per cent that they have led to more red tape. There is only one point, the situation of women, where there is a clear majority (58.2 per cent) who believe that the situation has been improved. But our two groups generally agree on this gloomy picture of the situation: in some cases, CM supporters are even slightly more positive than other officials. In other words, their assessment of the Commission' loss of authority does not seem to have been prompted by their view of the recent administrative reforms.

Moreover, dissatisfaction with the Kinnock reforms is not to be equated with a negative assessment of the inner functioning of the institution. While a relative majority overall (41.8 per cent, excluding those with no opinion) reckons that coordination between DGs does not work effectively, supporters of the Community method are more likely to consider that officials work first for the Commission itself, rather than for their DG<sup>xxvi</sup>. Both groups recognize that the Secretariat-General has gained ground in recent times, without this appearing as a source of major concern; nor are they particularly critical of the cabinets' role.

By contrast, there are clear divergences between the two groups' views on institutional leadership. One set of our questions related to respondents' appraisal of the performance of various presidents and we observe clear differences of opinion at this level, except for the Prodi Commission. The Santer Commission came in for the most criticism from the CM supporters, arguing that it was weak in relation to setting a policy agenda (56.0 per cent vs 43.7 per cent)<sup>xxvii</sup>, managing the house effectively (75.8 per cent vs 66.8 per cent)<sup>xxviii</sup> and defending the Commission in the EU system (67.7 per cent vs 54.2 per cent)<sup>xxix</sup>. As to the Barroso Commission, 47.1 per cent of the CM supporters were of the opinion that it was fairly or very weak in defending the Commission in the EU system, against 37.4 per cent of other officials who thought likewise<sup>xxx</sup> (Figure 8). In contrast, both groups concur on a more balanced assessment of its ability to effectively manage the Commission or to set the Union's political agenda. Unsurprisingly, CM supporters were more positive about the Delors Commission, both in terms of setting a policy agenda (99.5 per cent vs 95.6 per cent)<sup>xxxi</sup> and delivering on policy priorities (97.6 per cent vs 95 per cent)<sup>xxxii</sup>. This does suggest that, while all officials have fond memories of the Delors era, it is even more passionately seen as the golden age by those who support the CM.

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Figure 8 about here

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### ***B) Views about the future***

Having defined the group of supporters of the Community method by their vision of the functioning of the EU institutional system, we could expect it to hold precise views as to how European governance should evolve. Several elements are worth mentioning in this respect. First, CM supporters, unsurprisingly, would welcome transfers of authority to the

European level in several areas (with the notable exception of agriculture where, like other officials, they would favour a degree of decentralization). This is a general trend amongst Commission officials, as was seen in chape 4... There is even agreement between the groups on the hierarchy of priorities, with foreign policy, development, asylum and immigration ranking first. However, it is worthy of note that in every single policy area the CM supporters wish to have significantly more decision making at the EU level than do other officials,<sup>xxxiii</sup> from +0.39 scale points for competition and development policies to +0.78 for foreign and security policy. By considering the difference between desired and perceived actual authority for each policy area, as in Figure 9, we can see that there is broad agreement about the rank order, whilst CM supporters are consistently desirous of more authority at the EU level, significantly so for all policy areas except trade and competition.

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Figure 9 about here

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Supporters of the Community method also appear well disposed towards the idea that the College of Commissioners' should one day become the Government of the EU. Figure 10 shows how strongly CM supporters, in contrast to other officials, show a distinctly positive view of the Commission's role in this regard.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The total of favourable opinions in their ranks reaches 47.4 per cent, against 26.3 per cent amongst other officials. Yet, even in the pro-CM group, support for this option is not clear-cut since the level of negative opinions is pretty high (37.1 per cent). In contrast, a strong majority (70.3 per cent) of the members of that group (against 55.9 per cent) consider that the Commission's role as policy initiator is made more important by the enlargement of the EU,<sup>xxxv</sup> as shown in Figure 10. Having had to come to terms with an ever more assertive parliament in the last two decades, it could be

expected that Commission officials would not be so positive about sharing the Commission's sole right of legislative initiative with the European Parliament. Indeed, a majority (57.8 per cent) are against such a development versus 32.4 per cent in favour. Figure 10 shows that there is only marginal difference between our two groups on this issue, with more difference being displayed within each group.

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Figure 10 about here

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To summarize, it appears that CM supporters are more likely than other officials to support transfers of authority to the EU and that they are eager to see one of the Commission's strategic assets, its right of initiative, consolidated. None of these findings are particularly surprising. Yet they should not be seen as an unqualified call for greater centralization, nor as a self-interested plea. Over a third of CM supporters do not subscribe to the ideal of the Commission as the government of Europe, and a similar number would welcome greater powers being vested in the European Parliament, although only 12 per cent hold both positions. In the minds of those people at least, the Community method should not be associated with a centralisation of authority in the hands of the Commission.

In the official discourse, the Commission's institutional privileges are justified by its duty to remain neutral and serve the general interest; the collegiality principle being a key element in this respect. This view finds a clear echo amongst supporters of the Community method, for whom services have the responsibility to support politically-agreed positions of the College; yet there is weak evidence that they (89.0 per cent) are more likely than others (84.6 per cent) to hold this view.<sup>xxxvi</sup> They also display a relative distaste for state-based

considerations at all levels of activity. Thus, asked what they thought about the need to ensure that posts be distributed in a geographically balanced basis, they were more likely to disagree (51.9 per cent) than other officials (40.6 per cent)<sup>xxxvii</sup>. They were also more likely (54.6 per cent, against 45.4 per cent for other officials)<sup>xxxviii</sup> to find it problematic for officials to manage dossiers of particular interest to their member state. Quite logically, over two thirds of them are hostile to the idea of having one Commissioner per member state, preferring a smaller and more efficient College. While this feeling is widely shared among the persons polled in our survey, CM supporters were even stronger opponents.<sup>xxxix</sup>

## **5. CONCLUSION: A CITADEL UNDER SIEGE**

There is little doubt that the post-Maastricht period has been a difficult one for the Commission, which has lost ground to the other poles of the ‘institutional triangle’, namely the Council and the Parliament. This has been the dominant view amongst observers of the EU scene for a long time and our survey has shown that it was shared by a vast majority of Commission staff. Considering the events in the ensuing months since the survey, and particularly the way the Union’s response to the economic and financial crisis has been orchestrated, there is little reason to believe that their view will have changed. Yet the awareness of the Commission’s declining influence does not appear to have caused a change of paradigm, since support for the Community method has remained quite high.

In some respects, these might appear as ‘non-findings’ since, according to a widespread view of bureaucratic politics, bureaucrats are expected to defend views that serve their own interest. Yet one should not forget that the Commission has seen momentous changes over the last two decades. It has witnessed the emergence of powerful rivals and has been subjected to major reforms, while at the same time its membership has been changed by the

recruitment of nearly 20 per cent of officials from the new member countries. In these circumstances, it was far from sure that the average world view within the institution would have remained unchanged.

For supporters of the Community method, that system has demonstrated its effectiveness and needs to be consolidated, rather than amended. Others may theorize the emergence of new forms of governance, but, for the average Commission official, the operating system carved by Monnet and his followers still appears better suited to the needs of the XXIst century Union than any of its rivals. Furthermore, that view featuring equally highly among newcomers and in the newer generation cannot therefore be dismissed too lightly as a ‘thing of the past’. However, the picture that results from our survey is more complex than it might seem at first sight. Even staunch supporters of the Community method are cautious towards the idea of transforming the Commission into a fully fledged ‘government of Europe’. Similarly, while wary about the European Parliament, they are not systematically hostile to an expansion of its role.

Like many of their colleagues, supporters of the Community method consider that the enlargement has weakened cohesion within the Commission and they have a fairly negative assessment of the impact of the Kinnock reforms. Yet it is mostly in relation to their evaluation of their leadership’s ability to defend the Commission in the EU system that a clear difference with other officials appears. Altogether, these elements may suggest that, should the Commission decide to be bolder and more assertive in its relations with other institutions, this attitude would find a positive echo in the Berlaymont building. Whether this can happen, and what response it would elicit from the national capitals is, needless to say, quite another story...



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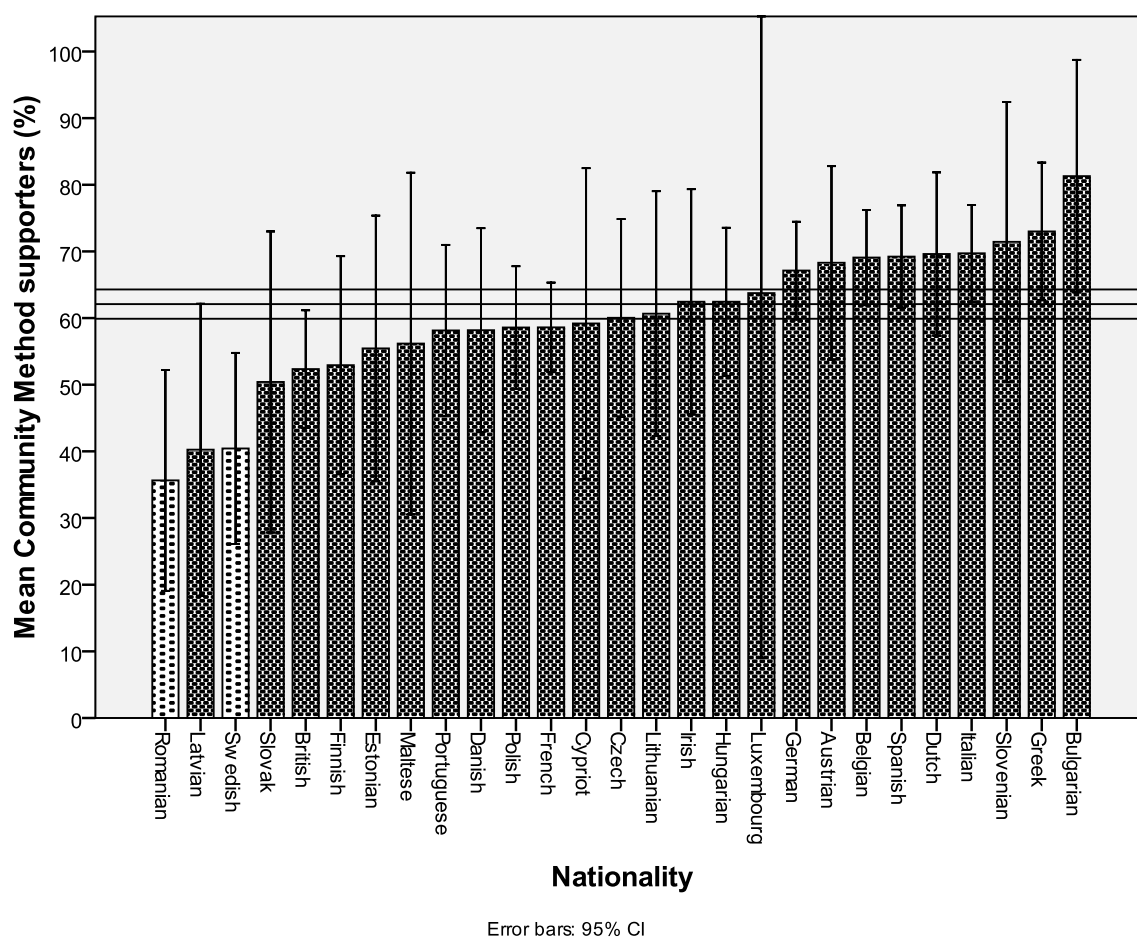
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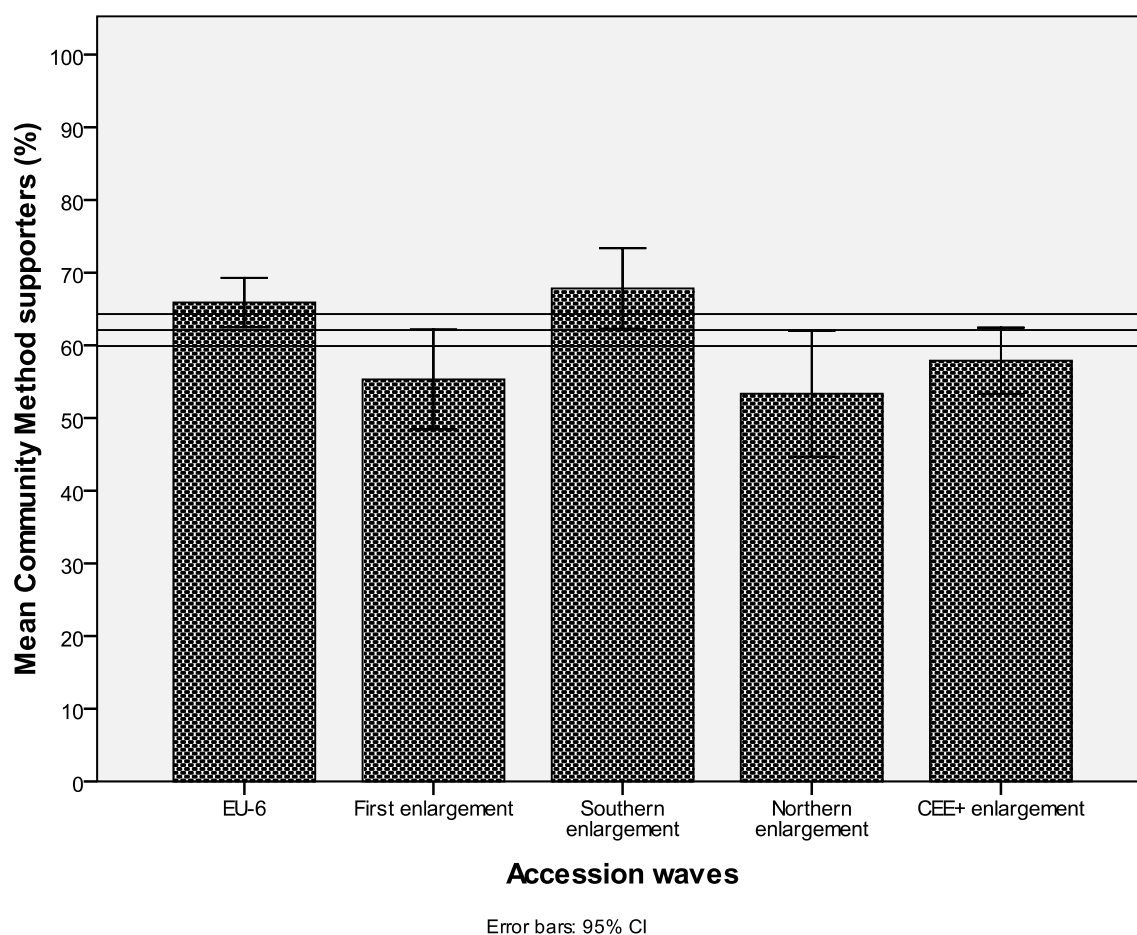
**Figure 1 Support for the Community method by nationality**



NB  $n=1824$ , with  $n \geq 18$  for each nationality (except Luxembourg,  $n=6$ ). The vertical bars represent the mean value by nationality and the error bars the 95 percent confidence intervals. The lighter coloured bars at the lower end highlight which nationalities have support profiles that differ significantly below that of the overall mean. The overall mean is shown by the central horizontal line, with the 95per cent confidence interval either side.

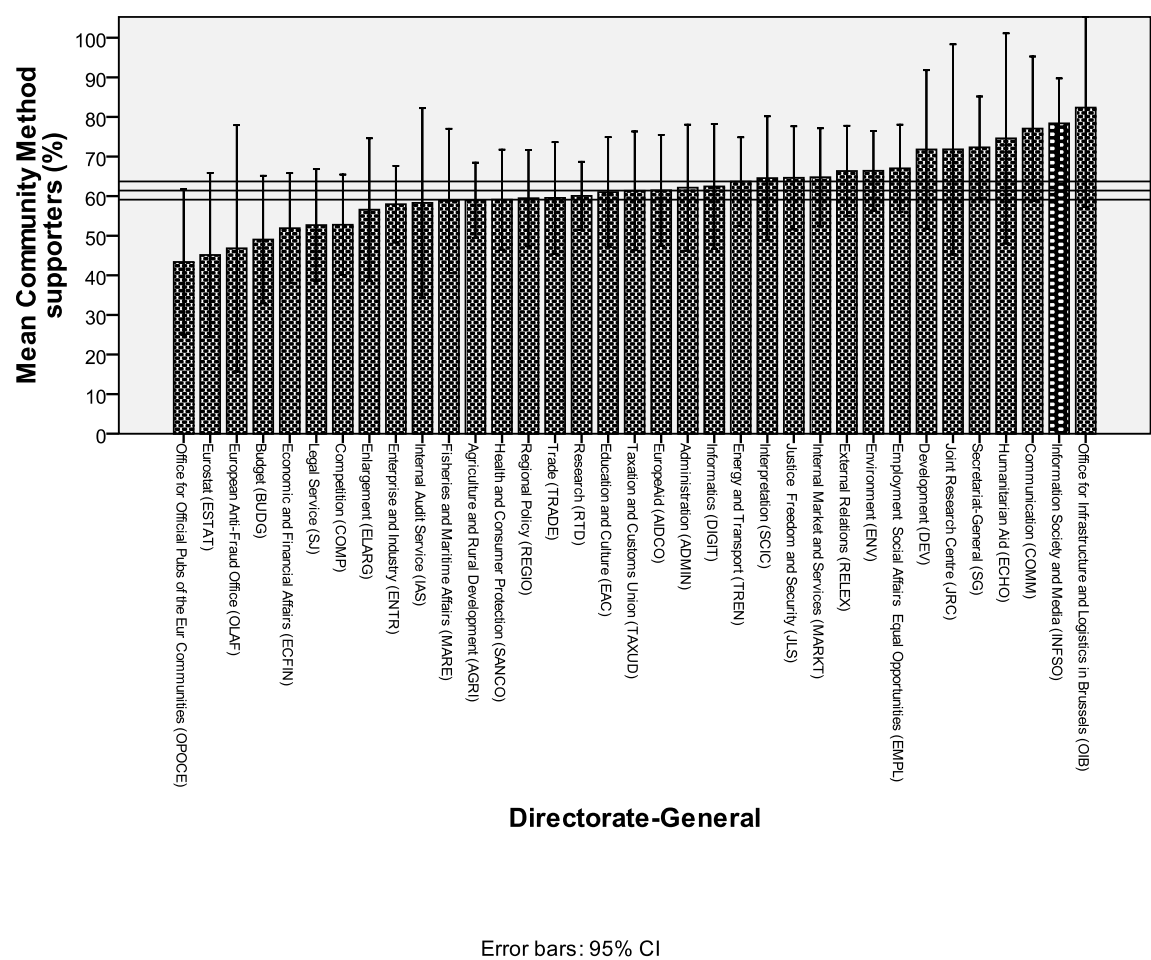
**Figure 2**

**Support for the Community method by date of accession**



NB n=1824. The vertical bars represent the mean value by date of accession and the error bars the 95 percent confidence intervals. The overall mean is shown by the central horizontal line, with the 95per cent confidence interval either side.

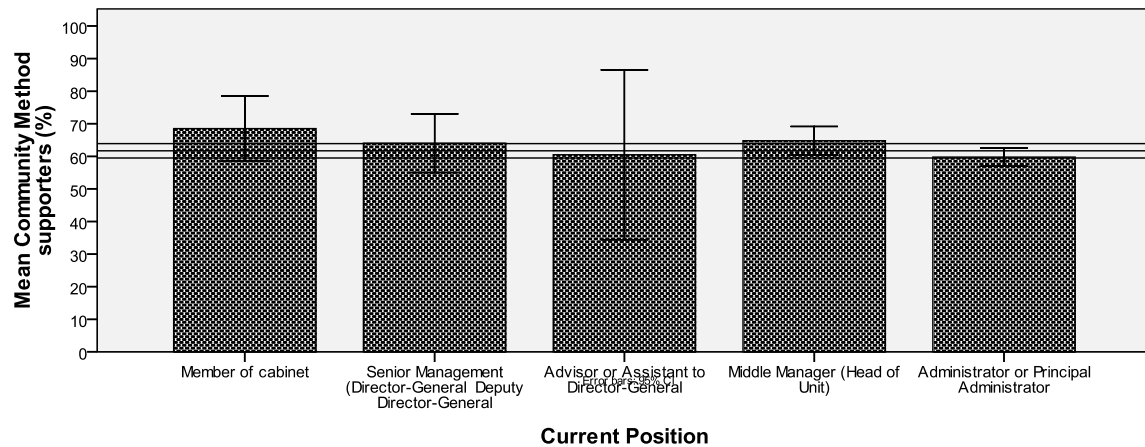
**Figure 3 Support for the Community method by Directorate General**



NB n=1751, excluding n<12 for any DG. The vertical bars represent the mean value by DG and the error bars the 95 percent confidence intervals. The darker coloured bar at the higher end highlights the DG which has a support profiles that is significantly higher than that of the overall mean . The overall mean is shown by the central horizontal line, with the 95 per cent confidence interval either side.

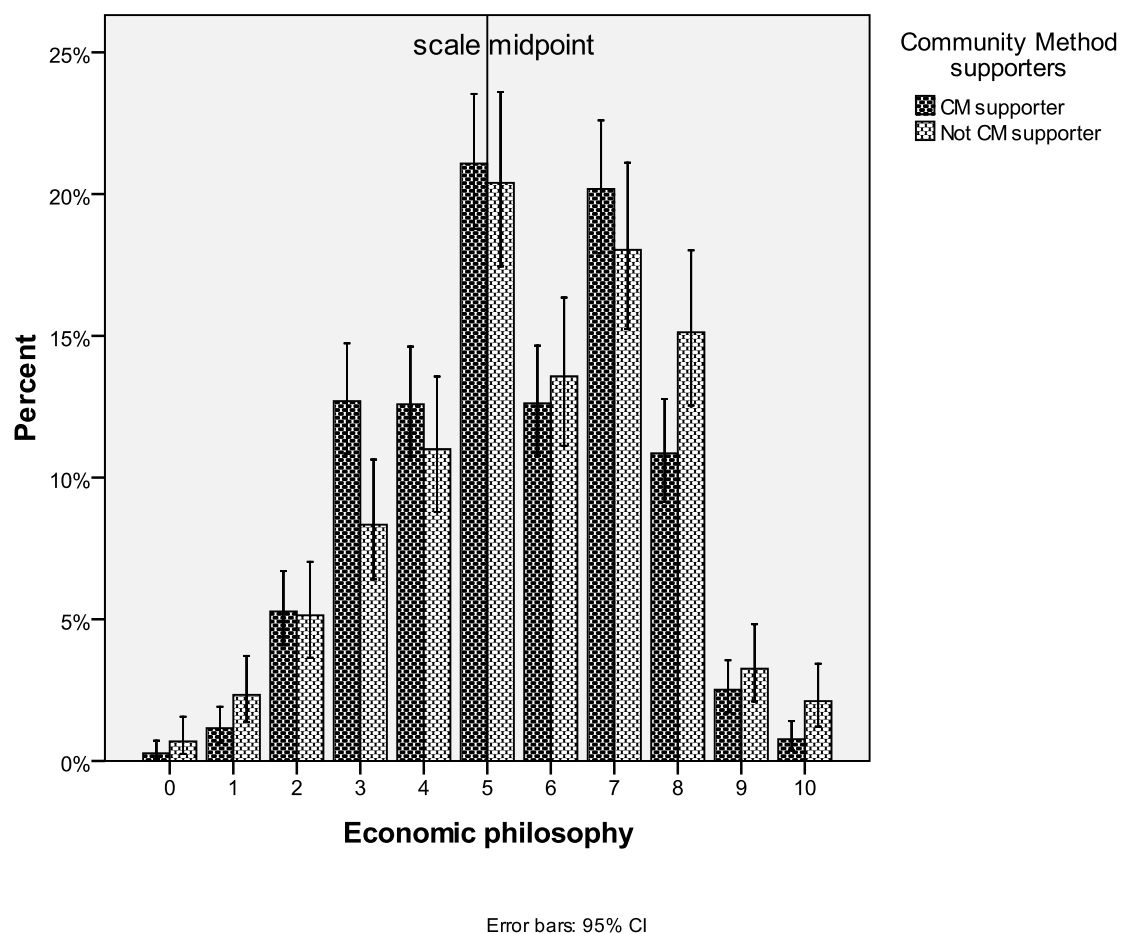
**Figure 4**

**Support for the Community method by seniority**



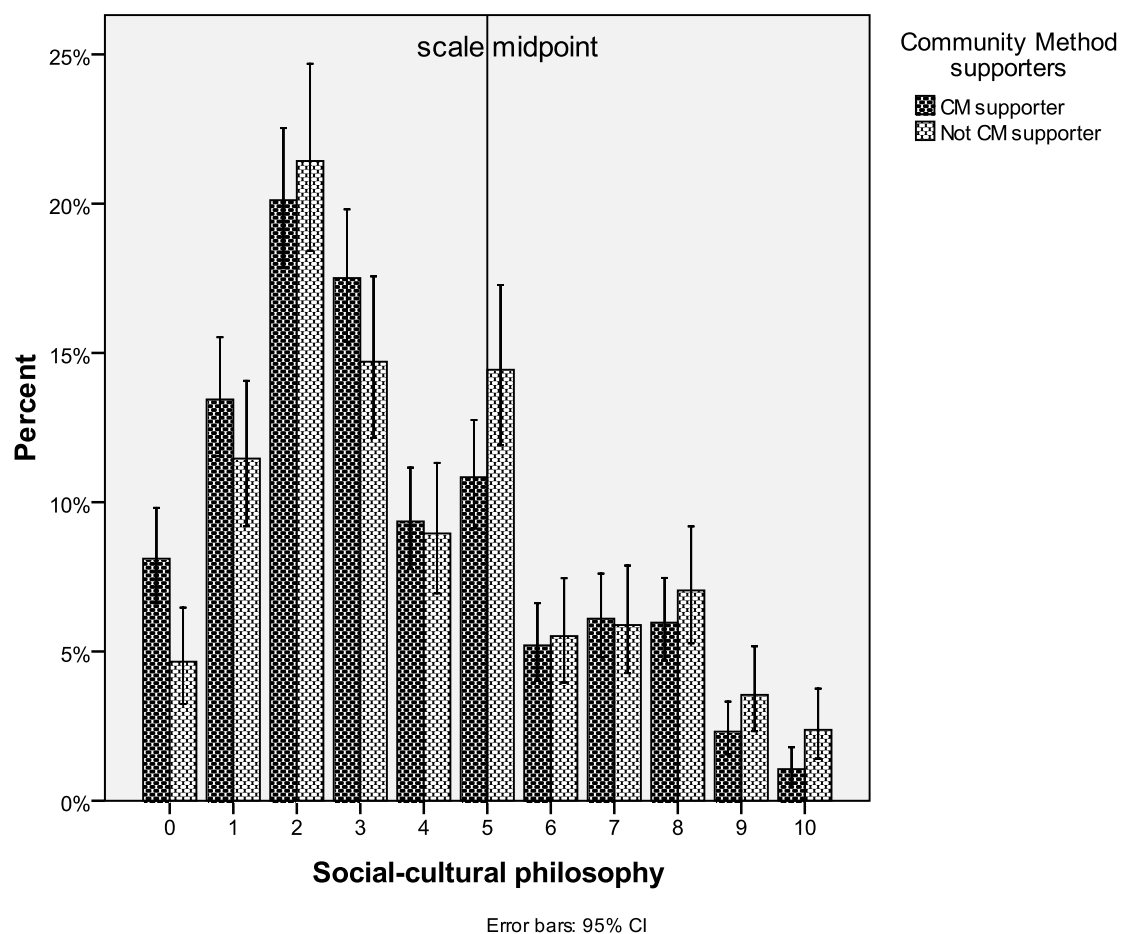
NB n=1846. The vertical bars represent the mean value by level of seniority and the error bars the 95 percent confidence intervals. The overall mean is shown by the central horizontal line, with the 95 per cent confidence interval either side.

**Figure 5**      **Support for the Community method by economic philosophy**



NB n=1782. The vertical bars represent the percentage at each scale point from 0 (a greater role for government) to 10 (a greater role for markets) and the error bars the 95 percent confidence intervals.

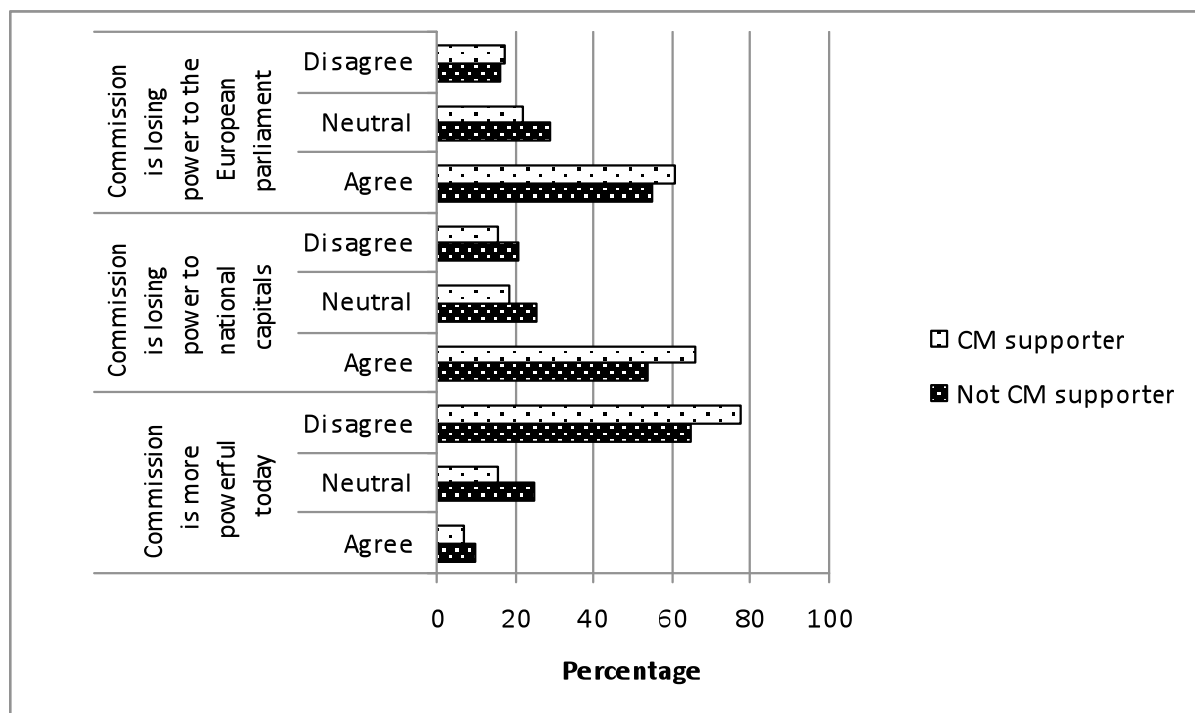
**Figure 6 Support for the Community method by socio-cultural philosophy**



NB n=1783. The vertical bars represent the percentage at each scale point from 0 (more liberal) to 10 (more conservative) and the error bars the 95 percent confidence intervals.

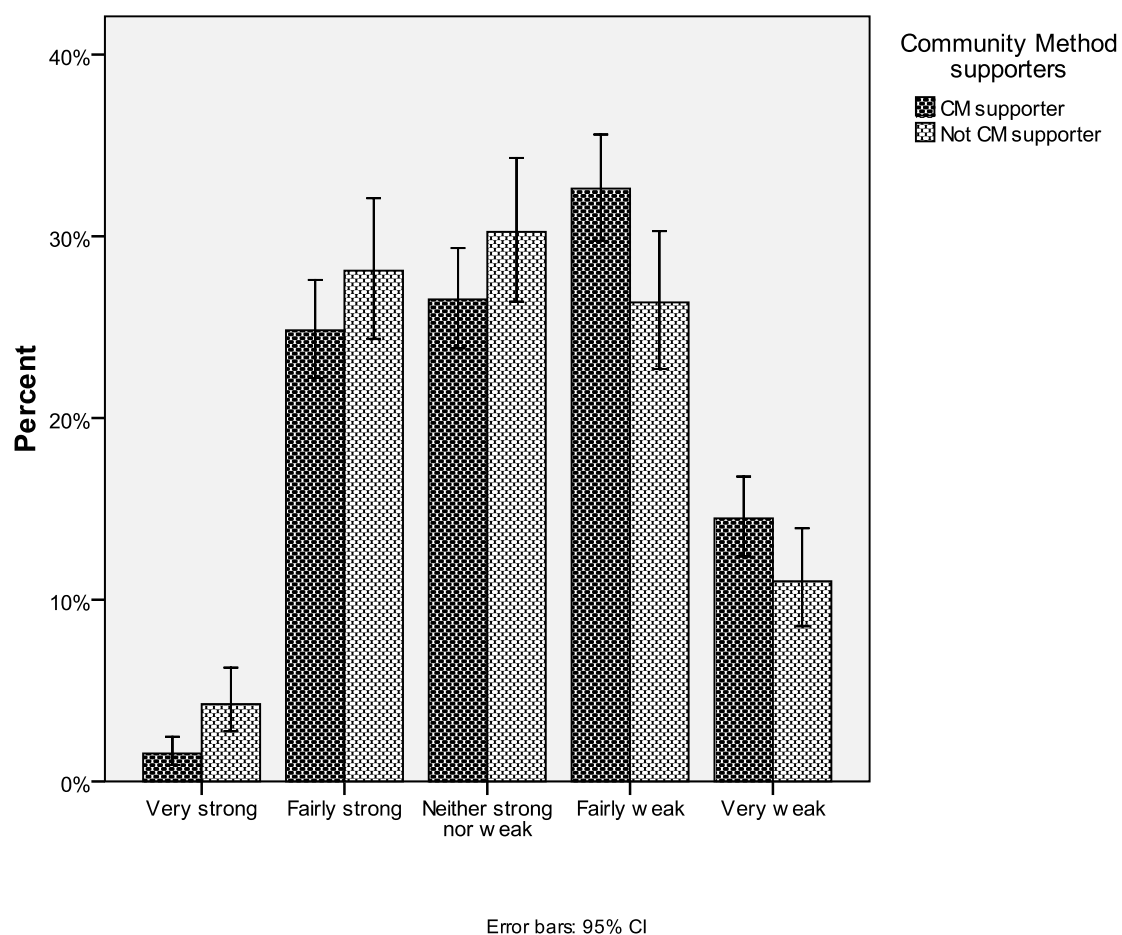


**Figure 7** Perceptions of the changing power of the Commission by support for the Community method



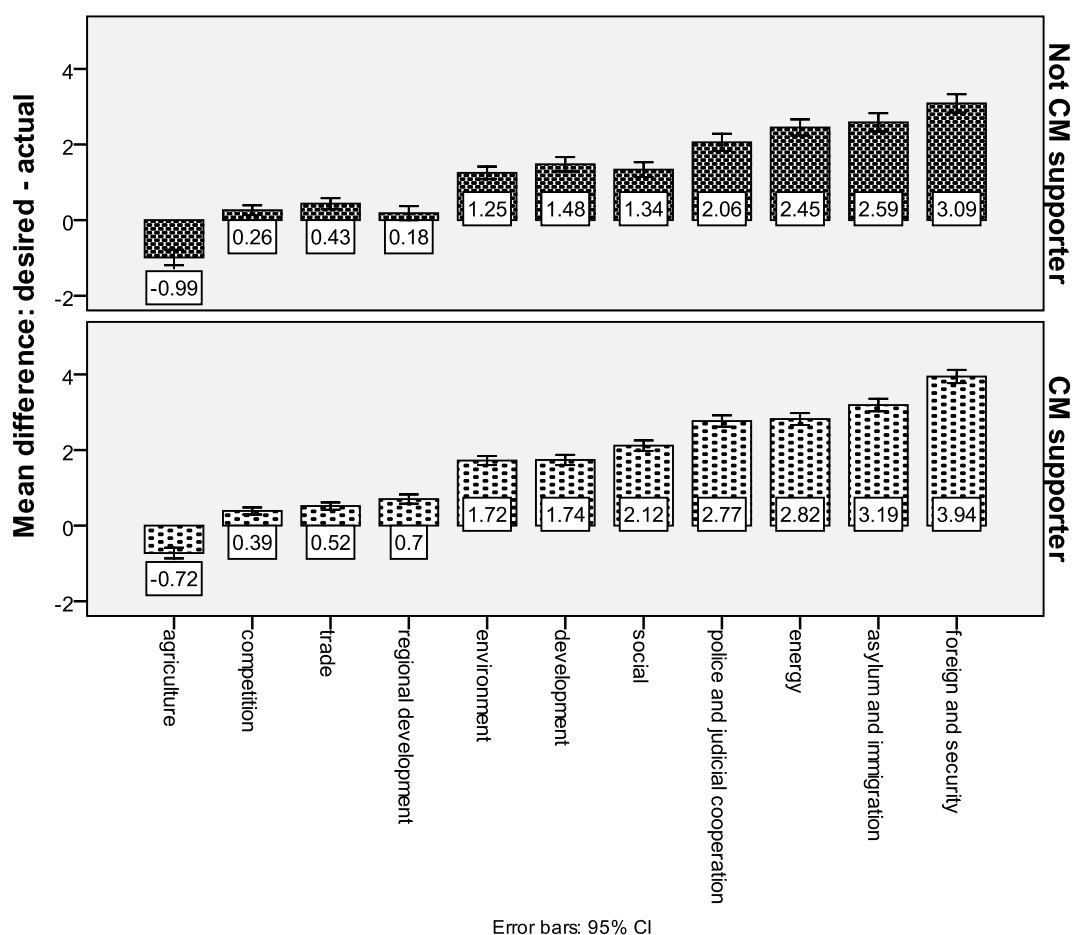
NB  $1515 \leq n \leq 1525$ . The horizontal bars represent the percentage of agreement, neutrality or disagreement for each question.

**Figure 8** Views on how well the Barroso Commission defends the Commission in the EU system by support for the Community method



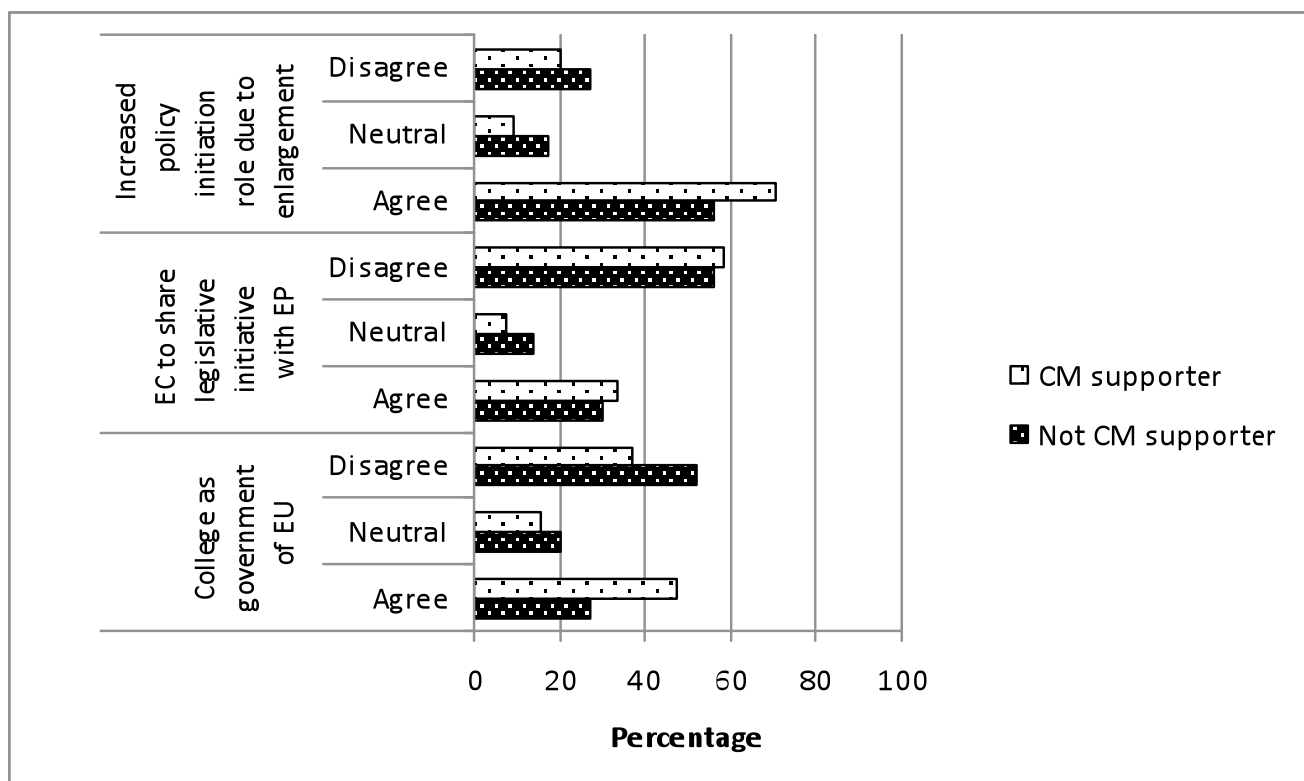
NB n=1499. The vertical bars represent the percentage of agreement or disagreement and the error bars the 95 percent confidence intervals.

**Figure 9** Mean difference between desired and perceived distribution of authority between member states and the EU in various policy areas by support for the Community Method



NB n varies between 1574 and 1624. The vertical bars represent the mean value on a scale from 0 (exclusively national/sub-national) to 10 (exclusively EU). The error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals around the mean for each policy area.

**Figure 10**      **Opinions of where power should reside in the EU and its role by support for the Community method**



NB  $1718 \leq n \leq 1752$ . The horizontal bars represent the percentage of agreement, neutrality or disagreement for each question.

## Appendix

**Table 1      Personal and national characteristics supporting the Community Method**

|                                       | Model 1           |          |                        | Model 2           |           |                        |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------|------------------------|
|                                       | B<br>(SE)         | Wald     | Odds ratio<br>(95% CI) | B<br>(SE)         | Wald      | Odds ratio<br>(95% CI) |
| <b>Personal</b>                       |                   |          |                        |                   |           |                        |
| Commitment to Europe<br>(ref cat: no) | 0.728<br>(0.108)  | 45.45*** | 2.072<br>(1.676:2.561) | 0.674<br>(0.109)  | 37.946*** | 1.963<br>(1.584:2.432) |
| Socio-cultural<br>philosophy<br>index | -0.061<br>(0.020) | 9.32**   | 0.941<br>(0.905:0.978) | -0.067<br>(0.020) | 10.876**  | 0.935<br>(0.899:0.973) |
| Economic<br>philosophy<br>index       | -0.066<br>(0.025) | 6.89**   | 0.936<br>(0.891:0.983) | -0.053<br>(0.026) | 4.275*    | 0.949<br>(0.902:0.997) |
| <b>National</b>                       |                   |          |                        |                   |           |                        |
| Protestantism<br>(proportion)         |                   |          |                        | -0.438<br>(0.195) | 5.035*    | 0.645<br>(0.440:0.946) |
| Index of<br>multi-level<br>governance |                   |          |                        | 0.014<br>(0.005)  | 6.853**   | 1.014<br>(1.004:1.025) |
| Reduction in<br>-2LL                  | 63.77***          |          |                        | 77.147***         |           |                        |
| Nagelkerke<br>R <sup>2</sup>          | 0.048             |          |                        | 0.058             |           |                        |
| Hosmer and<br>Lemeshow<br>test (sig)  | 0.803             |          |                        | 0.989             |           |                        |
| n<br>(unweighted)                     | 1794              |          |                        | 1794              |           |                        |

\*\*\* p<0.001; \*\* p<0.01; \* p<0.05

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup>  $p=0.043$ ; 95CI: 0.1 – 10.8 per cent.

<sup>ii</sup>  $p=0.268$ .

<sup>iii</sup>  $p=0.546$ .

<sup>iv</sup>  $p=0.488$ .

<sup>v</sup>  $p=0.435$ .

<sup>vi</sup>  $p<0.001$ .

<sup>vii</sup>  $p=0.226$ .

<sup>viii</sup>  $p=0.842$ .

<sup>ix</sup>  $p=0.286$ .

<sup>x</sup>  $p=0.044$ ;  $\phi=0.047$ .

<sup>xi</sup> 95CI: 0.1 – 9.3 per cent.

<sup>xii</sup>  $p=0.018$ .

<sup>xiii</sup>  $p=0.001$ .

<sup>xiv</sup> The multilevel modelling, carried out using MLwiN (v2.02) with Markov Chain Monte Carlo methods to allow Bayesian estimates, shows that no additional variance is found between countries once adjustment is made for the fixed variables, implying that a logistic regression would offer an equivalent analysis. Table 1 shows the results of the logistic regression run in SPSS (v17).

<sup>xv</sup> One scale point increase in socio-cultural conservatism decreases the odds of being a CM supporter by 6.5% (95%CI: 2.7% to 10.1%), holding all other variables constant.

<sup>xvi</sup> Those whose reasons for joining the Commission included wishing to build Europe have increased odds of being a CM supporter of 96.2% (95%CI: 58.5% / 142.9%), holding all other variables constant.

<sup>xvii</sup> One scale point increase in economic support for markets decreases the odds of being a CM supporter by 5.2% (95%CI: 0% / 9.9%), holding all other variables constant.

<sup>xviii</sup> A one per cent increase in the proportion of protestants in a country shows a 0.36% decrease in the odds of support for CM (95%CI: 0.05% / 0.56%), holding all other variables constant.

<sup>xix</sup> A one scale point increase in the index of multi-level governance in a country shows a 1.4% increase in the odds of support for CM (95%CI: 0% / 2.4%), holding all other variables constant.

<sup>xx</sup>  $p<0.001$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.159$ .

<sup>xxi</sup>  $p<0.001$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.134$

<sup>xxii</sup>  $p=0.317$

<sup>xxiii</sup>  $p=0.008$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.091$ .

<sup>xxiv</sup>  $p=0.217$

<sup>xxv</sup>  $p=0.131$

<sup>xxvi</sup>  $p=0.006$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.096$ .

<sup>xxvii</sup>  $p=0.039$ .

<sup>xxviii</sup>  $p=0.014$ .

<sup>xxix</sup>  $p<0.001$ .

<sup>xxx</sup>  $p<0.001$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.117$ .

<sup>xxxi</sup>  $p=0.001$ .

<sup>xxxii</sup>  $p=0.038$ .

<sup>xxxiii</sup>  $p<0.001$ .

<sup>xxxiv</sup>  $p<0.001$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.201$ .

<sup>xxxv</sup>  $p<0.001$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.174$ .

<sup>xxxvi</sup>  $p=0.044$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.079$ .

<sup>xxxvii</sup>  $p<0.001$ , Cramer's  $V=0.120$ .

<sup>xxxviii</sup>  $p=0.001$ , Cramer's  $V=0.106$ .

<sup>xxxix</sup>  $p=0.007$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.092$ .