Chapter Three

Organizational theories and the EU administration

Organizational theory is an important tool for the analysis of an organization such as the EU administration. Yet, it should be noted that organizational theory is not a close-knit theoretical system. It has been argued that organizational theory consists of three dominant themes: structure, process, and culture. A dominant theme is taken to mean the display and use of an overall viewpoint (Bakka and Fivelsdal 1999, 21). The three dominant themes should not be seen as separate, but as attempts to focus on certain aspects of organizations like the EU administration. At the same time, the aim of studying the structures and cultures of organizations is to be able to say something about the processes that take place in the organizations.

Furthermore, efficiency and legitimacy are emphasized as fundamental aspects of the EU administration that touch upon the structure, process, and culture of the administration. These aspects are, therefore, considered in this chapter as well. An efficient administration is the objective of every administration, and the question of legitimacy can be raised in connection with the activities of non-national administrations, especially because they have not been given legitimacy from the nation-state.

Section 3.1. addresses the EU administrational structure, and section 3.2. analyses the organizational processes of the EU administration, while section 3.3. analyses the organizational culture of the EU administration. In section 3.4., the legitimacy of the EU administration is considered, and section 3.5. raises the
question of the efficiency of the EU administration. Finally, section 3.6. outlines the model of the EU’s administration as a political bureaucracy.

3.1. Organizational structure of the EU administration

Overall, structure can be defined as “a stable arrangement of components within a whole.” Large and complex organizations cannot exist without a basic and formal structure. A formal organizational structure is a question of systemizing and distributing tasks in order to secure a satisfactory use of the organization’s resources (Bakka and Fivelsdal 1999, 43). In relation to this, organizational theory has pointed out numerous organizational structures (e.g. matrix-organization and line-staff organization) to optimally solve the problem of distributing tasks in different types of organizations.

Next to the formal structure, there is an informal structure of groups and networks. The existence of these groups and networks can be interpreted in different ways. Firstly, the informal structure can be seen as an attempt to establish a feeling of social certainty in the organization. This means that informal structures emerge among different players of the organization who are in different ways similar to or supportive of each other. Secondly, it can be interpreted as an attempt to supplement the formal system to reduce the uncertainty in the organization’s decision-making process. Hence, the objective of informal structures and networks is to correct defects in the formal decision-making process. Thirdly, the informal structure can be interpreted as an attempt from the employees to twist or adapt the organization to their own interests and needs. This is coherent with the role of the organizational players in the Niskanen model of bureaucracy (section 2.1.). In some cases, this can result in a detachment of the informal structure from the formal organizational structure, with the result of the two structures operating with different objectives (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Meanwhile, this presupposes that the formal structure has no possibilities of sanctioning the subversive activities of the informal structure.

In respect to the EU’s administration and its relations to national administrations, it is of interest that employees with the same nationality constitute an informal network in the European Commission and other parts of the EU administration. It is probably not irrelevant that EU-employees socialize primarily with colleagues of the same nationality in their free time (Michelmann 1978b, 493). The most important informal national networks and groups in the EU administration are often referred to as mafias. There has been no attempt

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1 Earlier on especially, it was claimed that the centres of the mafias of the different Member States were the Commissioners’ Cabinets (Michelmann 1978a). Since the Cabinets