

## **When do National Administrative Representatives Engage in Multi-level Administrations?**

*Evidence from Small Member States' Representatives in EU Agencies*

*Abstract*

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*“Grenzenlose Kooperation in und mit der Verwaltung? Verwaltungshandeln in komplexen Strukturen”*

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National agency representatives are omnipresent in EU agencies: They provide information; they contribute in working groups to EU agencies' output; and they have the majority of votes in the agencies' boards. Nonetheless, research indicates that it is predominantly EU-level actors such as the Commission that pro-actively shape EU agencies' work, while national representatives mostly behave passively. For national representatives, influencing a decision is costly. Forging agreement among the (qualified) majority of member states is time-consuming, especially for representatives whose prime affiliation is their home agency and who face resource constraints. This paper asks under which conditions representatives of national agencies nonetheless engage pro-actively in coordination within EU agencies.

Under resource constraints, national agency officials have to prioritize between their national tasks and representing their agency and their member state interests within EU agencies' working groups and networks. The paper's basic assumption is that national representatives in multi-level administrations will engage pro-actively once propositions on a higher level profoundly touch upon their preferences. In the multi-level setting of EU agencies, three drivers behind national agency officials' pro-active engagement are theoretically possible: First, they may prioritize defending their member states' or government's interest, e.g. in decisions that affect core industries or policies. Second, they may want to influence decisions that have an impact on their (regulatory) core mission at home, e.g. the formulation of general regulatory standards. Third, they may be driven by decisions that affect their daily tasks and thus their institutional interest, e.g. decisions that reduce their workload by expanding routine tasks of the EU agency.

The paper aims to identify under which configuration which of these three incentives dominates pro-active behaviour among national agency representatives. To do so, the paper compares the behaviour of national representatives from three small EU member states (Malta, Luxembourg and Slovenia) in a set of three EU agencies that are each relevant to one country but less to the others. Due to their small administrative capacities and resources, representatives from these states face greater incentives than those from larger national bureaucracies to lay-off tasks and decisions to the EU agency procedures and remain passive – except if one of the incentives, described above, encourages them to prioritize pro-active engagement in one of the multiple working groups in EU agencies. Thus, this most similar system design among ‘hard cases’ allows to observe what drives national agency representatives’ engagement at the core. Moreover, their prioritisations of activities in EU agencies, measured via minutes, documents and interviews, reveals under which configurations national representatives pro-actively represent their government’s or their own institutional preferences in the EU agencies despite the strain on their limited resources. This contributes to our knowledge about the drivers behind bureaucratic behaviour in multi-level administrative systems.