

# 5

## THE MYTH OF NATIONALITY: NATIONAL NETWORKS IN A MULTINATIONAL COMMISSION?

As elaborated in Chapter 3, according to the homophily principle, individuals have an overall tendency to build networks with culturally similar others. This chapter tests the cultural similarity hypotheses presented in Chapter 3 and answers the question whether Commission officials display homophilic tendencies in the composition of their task-related informal networks. Do Commission officials choose to network with others based on nationality, region (North-South) or language when in need of information and advice on work-related matters? Are national networks a myth or everyday reality in the European Commission?

### 5.1

#### **Why Would a Commission Official Contact Culturally Similar Officials?**

When directly asked whether nationality or culture has an effect on the networks of Commission officials, 57.3% of them said nationality mattered and 61% of them said culture mattered. Officials explained that culture keeps on influencing everyone's behaviour. It is a part of the identity and background of each official that they bring with themselves and it does not fade away. Even after twenty years of working in the Commission, a Greek remains a Greek and a Dane a Dane (Official #88). Culture is furthermore seen as a factor that brings people together. It forms the basis for "a special relationship with people from your own nationality" (Official #59). As such, sharing a culture embodies the taken-for-granted assumption of similarity which in turn makes nationality a binding factor in the multinational Commission bureaucracy.

One official summarised this phenomenon as if she was reciting a passage out of homophily theory: "It is just easier for culturally similar people to build a network and to sustain close relationships" (Official #75). For Commission officials, it is convenient to contact another official of their own nationality. To

begin with, it is easier to establish contacts with compatriots (Officials #2, #22, #100). When you do not know someone that well, you know how to approach them when it is someone from your own country of origin (Official #87). For the same reason, you also tend to have more spontaneous contacts with others from your own nationality (Official #76).

Sharing the same culture means avoiding friction in communication: “It doesn’t mean there is a better feeling, but it’s easier communication” (Official #82). It is simply a “mental matter” (Official #104).

I think the very fact that people can speak to each other in their own language and share the same cultural references makes it easier to form friendships and alliances, so it’s not surprising that certain nationalities have strong networks amongst them... It can be, if I have a particular problem with the Health and Consumer Protection DG, the fact that the Director-General is British and I know him means that I can ring him and explain to him, he will get it, he will understand immediately what I’m talking about, whereas if it’s, I don’t know, a Greek ... I don’t know very well at all, it will be a much more complicated thing to set up. It’s just easier communication and can create, not necessarily, but it can create mutual trust. (Official #69)

As the example above also suggests, communication between officials from the same nationality is faster and smoother since they understand each other more quickly (Officials #75, #76, #119). National culture provides in this sense a set of shared meanings and symbols. Having the same background lessens the need to explain the assumptions shared by compatriots. As a result, mutual understanding is facilitated.

Sharing the same nationality also lowers the barriers to access. The willingness to help the other may be greater if it is a compatriot.

If someone has the same nationality or she went to the same university, for example, I would be more willing to receive her when I have too much work to do. It is not that we differentiate between nationalities, but I believe that it is natural. It is not that you will be more difficult for others, but you will be more open to help someone who is of your nationality. At least, this is how I react. I know that there are a lot of people in the Commission, for example, especially the French who say ‘I am now at the Commission, so I am European; I am not French anymore’. Not me! Because yes, we are European above all and I work for the Commission, but for me France is important. But of course within the legal limits. It is not because I am French and because a French person calls me that I will give him a secret document, for example. That? No! But to receive and to help people, to give information, to explain, well yes. [My translation] (Official #17)

As the foregoing quote suggests, nationality can facilitate access by means of a shared identity. That easier access is related to this loyalty aspect emanating from a shared identity is reflected in this official’s account in two ways. Firstly, she differentiates herself from other compatriots, who in her point of view re-

fuse to let their national identity play a role because they put their European identity to the fore as Commission officials. Plausibly, for these officials, sharing the same nationality does not facilitate access. Secondly, she stresses that there are limits to the access and help that compatriots can obtain from her by specifying that it remains within the borders set by the rules and norms that Commission officials have to abide by. Her explanation is interesting in terms of demonstrating how different officials deal with their national and European identities when it comes to helping compatriots. That this help function may work in both directions is reflected in the answer of another official who says that he has a higher expectation of obtaining an answer to a question or a favour when he turns to a compatriot for such assistance (Official #22).

Whether it is a matter of communication or access, the explanations of Commission officials in their narrative accounts refer to hypothetical cases, from which we can conclude the following:

- In comparison to communication with officials from other nationalities, communication with one's own nationality is easier and faster, thus more effective and efficient. In this sense, given the choice, officials might have a preference for their own nationality.
- In a situation involving helping one another, the tendency to grant or receive help might be higher when a compatriot is involved.

The question remains, however, to what extent this potential of nationality is used by Commission officials. Is the social capital provided by cultural identity an active asset or a passive preference? Do Commission officials actually turn to compatriots because of the advantages with regard to communication and access while conducting their daily work?

## 5.2

### **Do Commission Officials Contact Compatriots?**

The word 'nationality' raises some automatic reactions from Commission officials. With its link to nationalism, nationality is unacceptable in the formal discourse: "Europe's administration is officially a world not of different nations and nationalities but of 'geographical balance'" (Quoted in Spence and Stevens 2006: 173). This formal discourse is what a researcher is bound to hear first, which is the product of a mix of conviction and political correctness:

[T]here is a strong feeling amongst many officials in the Commission that stereotypes are something that European civil servants have gone beyond. 'We don't think in terms of national difference.' There is an '*esprit européen*' [European spirit] and a European identity. If there are differences, they are 'personality differences'. If there are cultural differences, then that is a part of Europe's 'richness'. And so on.... It is also likely to be the response to any unknown outsider

## CHAPTER 5

naïve enough to pose a direct question on the issue, and it thereby constructs the boundaries of the Commission and its cultural proprieties. 'Personality differences' and 'cultural richness' are statements perceived by some to be political and moral correctness and seem to leave the idea of a European unity intact. (McDonald 2000: 62-63)

Indeed, the reference to personality was a common response to the open questions on whether nationality and culture matter.

Commission officials were keen to underline that nationality is not a shaping factor for their work: 53.7% expressed this unequivocally. With regard to their task-related networks, some were literally saying:

Nationality is not a dominating factor in networks. Work-related networks are multinational. (Official #52)

My work network is multinational. This reflects the Commission culture. (Official #87)

Others, however, dismissed paying attention to nationality as a form of behaviour that does not correspond to the identity of Commission officials:

There is not more contact with one nationality more than others.... Normally, the most part of colleagues who are here don't think in national terms. (Official #10)

and as if it were indeed an error that outside observers could make, a misperception:

It does not matter for work. I have not seen officials behaving in a 'national' way. A lot of it is perception. (Official #105)

It could be argued that I have also generated this reflex since asking about nationality could be considered as inappropriate by Commission officials as it clashes with their identity as independent European civil servants. Yet, as explained in Chapter 4, in order to prevent socially desirable answers, I designed my questionnaire in such a way as to avoid the topic of nationality until the end of the interview. Otherwise, my respondents might have guessed that I was after national networks and might have avoided naming any compatriots, thinking this would give a 'nationalistic' impression.

Instead, I asked officials to select the three people who they regularly contact for information or advice and consider to be the most important for conducting their work. I also collected data on the attributes (such as gender, age, field of education, DG, nationality) of these contact persons. To derive the networking patterns of the interviewed Commission officials, I match the nationality of the contact persons with that of the respondent and count in how many cases the nationality of the contacts is the same as the respondent. It appears that only 43 of the total of 241 contact persons are of the same nationality, which corresponds to a mere 17.8% of all contact persons. The average of same nationality contacts per person is 0.53 out of the maximum possibility of three. Furthermore, as Table 5.1 below shows, 49 of the 81 officials have no

same nationality contacts; that is 60.5 % of the officials have a purely multinational network which does not include any official of their own nationality.

TABLE 5.1: *Same Nationality Contacts per Official*

Number of Same Nationality Contacts	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
0	49	60.5%	60.5%
1	22	27.2%	87.7%
2	9	11.1%	98.8%
3	1	1.2%	100%

When we analyse Table 5.1 further, we see that the share of officials with no or only one same nationality contact adds up to 87.7% of the sample. These indicators strongly point out that networks are overwhelmingly **multinational** in the Commission. In terms of task-related informal networks, therefore, the norm of supranationality is embedded not only in the official Commission discourse but also in the daily work practice of Commission officials. As a result, Hypothesis 1 positing that Commission officials rely predominantly on compatriots for information or advice is rejected.

These results are in line with the results of a Commission survey in 1974, cited in the work of Michelmann (1978). Michelmann reported that the survey found no statistically significant relationship between nationality and interaction (Michelmann 1978: 492) and that the quality of interaction was also independent of nationality (ibid: 493). This led him to conclude that “under normal circumstances officials react to fellow civil servants as individuals and not as members of national contingents” (idem). These conclusions thus hold true for Commission officials interviewed three decades later.

### 5.3

#### Do Some Nationalities Contact Compatriots More?

The fact that Commission officials have multinational networks does not necessarily have to imply that there are no differences between nationalities in the extent to which they turn to compatriots. That nationalities differ in terms of their “national clubness” has been one of the findings of previous research on top Commission officials (Hooghe 1999b, 2001). Indeed, quite a number of Commission officials openly argued that some nationalities have a higher inclination to stick together (Officials #3, #7, #17, #26, #29, #69, #72, #116, #117, #120). Culture was once more offered as an explanation for such behaviour. Especially officials from Northern Europe tended to see officials of their own

## CHAPTER 5

nationality as “bad in networking” due to the fact that they have not been socialised in a culture which stresses networking skills.<sup>83</sup> In the words of a Dutch official:

I think because in some countries, cultures, networking is more normal... I'm not sure whether the Dutch people are the best networkers, as they are not the best diplomats. (Official #3)

It can in some cases be a matter of preference: “I have no national network because I have no preference for my nationality” (Official #114). Some nationalities prefer not to seek fellow countrymen when they are abroad:

I have the impression that the Dutch don't like to mingle that much abroad with other Dutch people. They're not fond of that. (Official #3)

I think it's our mentality. We Germans, maybe when we're abroad, we tend to separate from our compatriots. I mean when you're on holidays, you just don't want to meet Germans although they are everywhere. You can't escape from them, wherever you go. Maybe it's that. (Official #36)

Are these cultural tendencies also reflected in the choice of contact persons? Are there really differences among nationalities when it comes to contacting one's own nationals?

I present cross-tables to demonstrate the network patterns per nationality.<sup>84</sup> The results should be looked at with caution, however, due to the small size of officials per nationality in the sample. Table 5.2 indicates that contacts between compatriots seem to be a large Member State phenomenon as officials from Italy, the UK, Belgium, France and Germany have the highest percentage of same nationality contacts. As it will be recalled from Chapter 2 (see Table 2.4), these countries have the largest percentage of A-level officials in the European

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<sup>83</sup> It has also been previously argued that the Brits, Danes and Swedes fail to grasp the networking dynamics of the Commission's internal culture due to their anti-patronage cultures (Shore 2000: 200).

<sup>84</sup> Unfortunately, the differences cannot be tested for statistical significance since the empirical data violate the basic assumptions of ANOVA (Analysis of Variance), which is a statistical routine used to test whether the differences between groups are more significant than the differences between individuals. Firstly, as we have seen in Table 5.1, the distribution of contacts is skewed since the majority of the officials either have 0 or 1 same nationality contact. This violates the assumption of a normal distribution. Furthermore, ANOVA is sensitive to the size of groups. The null hypothesis that the groups are not statistically different from each other may be rejected due to the divergence of a small group, unless the smallest group contains at least 20% of the responses. Due to the large number of nationalities, none of the national groups fulfil this condition which does not make ANOVA a robust procedure for our empirical data. For further explanations on ANOVA, see Field (2005: 324).

TABLE 5.2: *Same Nationality Contacts per Nationality*

Nationality	Ratio Contacts with Same Nationality: Total Contacts	Percentage of Same Nationality Contacts
Italy	7/20	35%
France	10/30	33.3%
United Kingdom	3/9	33.3%
Belgium	6/20	30%
Germany	10/39	25.6%
Greece	4/21	19%
Czech Republic	1/6	16.7%
Ireland	1/9	11.1%
Spain	1/15	6.7%
Finland	0/15	0%
Austria	0/12	0%
Denmark	0/12	0%
Sweden	0/9	0%
Netherlands	0/6	0%
Portugal	0/3	0%
Other	0/15	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	43/241	17.8%

Commission. In contrast, the small Member State officials are clustered in the second-half of the table with their zero same nationality contacts. This is also reflected in the means of same nationality contacts, which is 0.19 for small Member States and 0.79 for large Member States.<sup>85</sup>

There is thus quite a difference between small and large Member State officials in terms of contacting their own nationality. However, it could be simply that large Member State officials have basically a higher probability of having same nationality contacts due to the effect of numbers. Indeed, some officials see the phenomenon of national networks as a large Member State affair that just reflects the size of their contingents (Officials #30, #31, #76, #106, #116). To determine whether this difference is due to the pure effect of size, I normalised

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<sup>85</sup> Note that Spain was also coded as a large Member State based on the number of its officials. I cannot test for the statistical significance of the difference of means between the two groups with the t-test since the variation in the dependent variable number of same nationality contacts is too low due to the skewed distribution.

## CHAPTER 5

the percentage of same nationality contacts by dividing it by the percentage of A-level officials each nationality has.<sup>86</sup>

TABLE 5.3: *Same Nationality Contacts Normalised*

Nationality	Ratio Percentage of Same Nationality Contacts : Percentage of A-level Officials
Czech Republic	9.76
Ireland	5.05
United Kingdom	4.22
Greece	4.04
Italy	3.47
Belgium	2.91
France	2.75
Germany	2.25
Spain	0.74

As we can see in Table 5.3, the pattern changes when we take the normalised scores. In the top five, three of the large Member States (France, Belgium, Germany) are replaced by small Member States (Czech Republic, Ireland, Greece). The shifts in the ranking are illustrated below in Table 5.4:

TABLE 5.4: *Ranking Same Nationality Contacts*

Rank	Percentage	Normalised Score
1	Italy	Czech Republic
2	France	Ireland
3	UK	UK
4	Belgium	Greece
5	Germany	Italy
6	Greece	Belgium
7	Czech Republic	France
8	Ireland	Germany
9	Spain	Spain

The most significant shifts in the ranking are the following:

- ↓ Italy drops from the top of the list to number 5.
- ↓ France drops from number 2 to number 7.

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<sup>86</sup> I used the Commission *Statistical Bulletin of Commission Staff 02/2006* figures cited in Table 2.4 to calculate the scores. I do not report the zero scores.



↑ Czech Republic jumps from number 7 to number 1.

↑ Ireland jumps from number 8 to number 2.

The only plausible interpretation, however, is again that the size of the nationality matters for explaining the tendency for same nationality contacts. This is why size has been included in the multivariate analysis in Chapter 6 as a control variable.

In terms of group cohesion and the overall willingness to know or seek each other out, there is a difference between the small and large nationalities (Official #110).<sup>87</sup> For small Member States the effect of small numbers brings group cohesion. The fact that there are not many others with the same nationality means that it is easy to get to know others from the same nationality. Officials from small nationalities, for example the Danes, the Finns, the Irish and the Greeks tend to automatically know other officials of their nationality, starting with those working for their DG. An Irish official explained:

Because it's a small community, people tend to see each other outside of work, to know each other and not be shy about contacting each other, whereas I think for the bigger Member States, it's less natural that they would know the Commissioner, know the Chef de Cabinet and for the Irish it's very natural. (Official #33)

For small nationalities, it is also sometimes a matter of speaking their native language<sup>88</sup>: they rarely have the opportunity to speak their own language, so they have to actively seek such contact, for instance the Danish or the Portuguese (Official #19). When it is a rare occurrence to meet someone from your own nationality, it forms an immediate (Official #90) or a stronger bond (Official #91). In the case of large Member States, the large number of officials means that officials inevitably have same nationality contacts since these Member States are represented overall in the Commission. Therefore, for large Member States nationality plays less of a role because it is simply not extraordinary to meet others of your own nationality.

The other visible pattern, which had already been alluded to at the beginning of this chapter is that five of the six nationalities which have no same nationality contacts are North European. Are the cultural differences between the individualistic Northerners and the collectivistic Southerners reflected in the data? Do the Southern officials stick more than the Northern officials to their own region and nationality? Or do both the Northerners and Southerners stick to officials from their own regions showing regional homophily?

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<sup>87</sup> This result is on the whole parallel to that of Hooghe (2001: 230-231). She also classifies small Member States as groups with a strong cohesion and large Member States as groups with a weak cohesion.

<sup>88</sup> I will deal with the language issue further in sections 5.5 and 7.3.

### The North-South Division: Another Myth?

The successive enlargements of the EU have resulted in an increasing number of different nationalities working together for the Commission bureaucracy. Some observers have suggested that the multiplicity of nationalities has caused a decrease in the cohesion between nationalities. Arguably, there has been “a renaissance of national attachments as numbers grow” (Quoted in Stevens and Stevens 2001: 132). However, the opposite argument can also be heard, namely that the increase in the number of nationalities has led to a decrease in the salience of nationality:

With the last enlargement, nationality has a diminishing role.... There is no distinction of nationality. With 25 countries, you can't make a distinction. You have to adapt to it and take it for granted. (Official #87)

For example, the growing number of nationalities has had an effect on the distribution of nationalities per unit or per DG: the Commission has become automatically more multinational as all nationalities are now spread out horizontally and vertically across the organisation.

Presumably, the plurality of nationalities has made regional identity an increasingly more relevant reference point for officials. The 1995 enlargement entailing Austria, Finland and Sweden was a turning point in this sense. This Northern enlargement has rendered the North-South division sharper than before. The relevance of the cultural belonging category North-South was confirmed by many Commission officials during the interviews: 52.4% of the officials referred to the existence of a North-South division – or the so-called “wine-belt vs. beer-belt division” (Official #50). Still other officials dismissed this North-South division calling it a prejudice that is often exaggerated (Officials #73, #82).

If you are confronted with this prejudice everyday, then perhaps you once believe in it. (Official #82)

Officials were quick in providing counter-examples to prove that the stereotypes are not true (Official #22), such as their experience with a totally disorganised German colleague (Official #83) or a talkative Finnish boss (Official #36).

Not all Northerners and Southerners necessarily fit the stereotypes and not all the work relationships between Northerners and Southerners are necessarily strained:

He's Swedish and my boss is French, so two extremes, and they are very close friends and they work extremely well together, so it's not always the case that because you're from the South and somebody else from the North that you cannot work together. But sometimes it provokes clashes, but in other cases it seems

to work perfectly. So therefore, I think it has a lot to do with the character of the persons involved rather than their cultural backgrounds. (Official #2)

Still, when it comes to the networking behaviour of North and South European officials, there is still a considerable degree of perception of cultural differences. To start with, there are attitude differences between the introverted Northerners vs. extroverted Southerners (Official #35).

For Finns, it's not natural to build networks because they are reserved and shy in social contacts. South Europeans are much more outspoken.... In Finland, you are not taught, also not when you are working for the government. (Official #52) Accordingly, this leads to the impression that Southerners are better at networking than Northerners. In the eyes of Northerners, Southerners are socially more active (Official #113) and have closer contacts (Official #36). It may also be that Southerners are just socially more "exuberant" than Northerners. The fact that the Northern networks are less visible for those who are not involved in them might just be because they are more reserved (Official #115).

North European officials, however, link the difference in networking behaviour primarily to the negative connotation of networking/lobbying in the North. Networking goes against the principles of transparency and merit:

I don't think the Swedes, for example, are very comfortable with the amount of informal influence that goes on because ... their tradition is much more transparency, for example. Whereas if you go further South, I think people just think transparency is stupid. Really! Because how can you ever get the outcome you like if everything is transparent? But that's exactly why the Swedes don't like it, so culture is very important. (Official #33)

There is still a margin, in which you choose to either take a completely formal stance or be more informal, and there you have character differences and you have also cultural differences according to me. According to my experience first in Bruges and later here in the Commission, it's really rather the Southern nationalities that do networking, that support each other independently of the merits of a certain case or question. They solve lots of problems having coffee together. Whereas in the Northern cultures, you find a certain distrust when it comes to being in a group of only the Germans together. Then everyone feels a bit uneasy and feels, 'Ok, we shouldn't be together just because we're all Germans'. It's really rather the contrary attitude, which ... I think is changing a bit, but still I think these are the general things. A German would never support another German just because he's German, only if he or she is convinced about the merits. (Official #38)

Due to the connection between networking and nepotism, Northerners tend to avoid such practices, but Northern officials usually point out that this perception is changing and that they are catching up (Officials #35, #38, #67, #111, #113, #114).

## CHAPTER 5

In general the Scandinavians are worse at networking because we are extremely scared of nepotism or... And yes, we go, we work very much by the book. And for example, the word 'lobby' has a very negative sense when you say it in Danish. So especially calling somebody because you know they're your friend or something is seen as kind of Mafiosi. I mean it used to be like that. I would say it's developing more ... because the Scandinavians are also more and more realising that they have to start lobbying a little bit. (Official #67)

On the contrary, even though the Southerners accept that they are more open and vivid (Officials #17, #58, #115), they argue that even the concept of networking itself is Northern, but that if by chance Southerners find themselves in a network, they maintain it better (Officials #22, #39, #58, #115).

Justified or not, these mutual perceptions are present and persistent, despite the fact that some officials tend to dismiss stereotypes. As a result of the perception of cultural differences, there is an inevitable "positive prejudice" towards other officials from the same region to start with (Official #119). As with nationality, the factor that matters the most is the ease of communication: both officials from the North and the South express that they understand and communicate better with people from their own cultural region due to the fact that they have the same mentality (Officials #9, #28, #75, #78, #108). In that sense, coming from the same region is the second cultural preference, especially for small Member State officials. A Portuguese official explains:

Some affinities are established through culture. Portuguese find it easy to establish contacts based on trust with the Spanish, the Italians and the Irish. This is impossible with the Nordics or it's difficult. Culture determines the way one communicates, one's feelings. It is important to know what the others are thinking and feeling and to understand their body language.... I have more Southerners in my network. Since the Portuguese are split in terms of relations and contacts, I form a bond with Southern officials because I don't have enough contact points otherwise. I have more personal relations with the Spanish. I'll first speak to these colleagues if I want information. (Official #106)

Due to this cultural common denominator (Official #52), some Northerners and Southerners admit that they subconsciously have respectively more Northerners or Southerners in their network as a result (Officials #12, #47, #52, #92, #106). Some even go so far as to argue that the Northern and Southern networks tend to be separate (Officials #75, #92).

Are these perceptions reflected in the task-related informal networks of Commission officials or is this just another myth? Are both Northerners and Southerners homophilic (contacting more people from their own region) such as the Council working group participants of Beyers and Dierickx (1997, 1998) or do the Northerners have a multinational network while the Southerners

stick more to other Southerners and compatriots as their collectivistic cultural tendencies would lead us to expect?

TABLE 5.5: *Distribution of Same Region Contacts per Region*<sup>89</sup>

Region	Same Region Contacts	Different Region Contacts	TOTAL
North	59 (53.2%)	52 (46.8%)	111
South	59 (48.8%)	62 (51.2%)	121
TOTAL	118 (50.9%)	114 (49.1%)	232

Table 5.5 reveals interesting results. First of all, the differences are very small between the North and South in terms of contacting officials from the same region. The contacts are almost evenly distributed between same (50.9% of all contacts) and different region (49.1% of all contacts) cells and if there is a group that prefers officials of their own region to those of the others, it is the Northerners. The difference between the proportion of same region contacts of Northerners and Southerners, though, is a mere 4.4%.

In terms of contacting officials of the same nationality, however, the patterns of Northerners and Southerners are slightly different, as Table 5.6 shows.

TABLE 5.6: *Distribution of Same Nationality Contacts per Region*

Region	Same Nationality Contacts	Different Nationality Contacts	TOTAL
North	14 (12.6%)	97 (87.4%)	111
South	28 (23.1%)	93 (76.9%)	121
TOTAL	42 (18.1%)	190 (81.9%)	232

<sup>89</sup> It will be recalled from Chapter 1 that Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK belong to the North, whereas Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain belong to the South (Abélès et al. 1993; Hofstede 1994; Egeberg 1996; Beyers and Dierickx 1997, 1998; Mc Donald 2000). The East European officials and the officials with double nationality (a combination of North-South European) were excluded from all calculations involving regional belonging.

CHAPTER 5

This time it is the Southern officials who contact their own nationality more than the Northerners. The Southerners have a relatively stronger tendency to rely on compatriots: Southerners have twice the number of same nationality contacts as Northerners.

Because the differences are rather small, it is worth cross-checking with the individual-level data. Table 5.7 displays the means<sup>90</sup> of same region and nationality contacts for North and South European officials.

TABLE 5.7: Means of Same Region & Same Nationality Contacts

Region	Mean Same Region Contacts	Mean Same Nationality Contacts
North	1.55	0.37
South	1.59	0.70

Though the difference between the means of same region contacts of officials is narrow (0.04), the Southerners have the slightly higher regional homophily score. The double-ended results, combined with the almost even distribution of contacts lead us to reject Hypothesis 2a. Similarly, we also cannot conclude that South European officials are more homophilic than North European officials when it comes to contacting officials from the same region, which leads us to reject Hypothesis 2b. The difference between the North and the South in terms of contacting officials from the same nationality, however, seems to be a more robust result and Hypothesis 2c cannot be rejected. That is why North-South will be kept in the logistic regression analysis as a dummy variable to retest whether South Europeans tend to have more same nationality contacts.

How can we explain the persistent North-South myth then? The qualitative interview material suggests that the cultural differences between the North and South European officials are rather pronounced in *the way they network*. In the words of a Southern official:

Human beings are human beings. It is a misconception that the South Europeans network more than the North Europeans. We have very similar approaches. The differences are in modality, in the way they do it or are perceived to be doing it. (Official #105)

Their individualism and collectivism is reflected in how they contact each other to discuss their work (Officials #13, #55): Northerners usually prefer to

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<sup>90</sup> As with the means of large and small Member State nationalities, I cannot test for the statistical significance of the difference of means with the t-test since the variation in the dependent variable number of same nationality contacts is too low due to the skewed distribution.

work autonomously and when they need assistance from their network, they contact others in written form, i.e. per e-mail. Southerners, on the other hand, like to set up meetings and coffee breaks (as illustrated in the quote on the first page of this book). If they cannot meet face-to-face, they prefer to telephone. The Commission provides leeway to individuals to observe their cultural preferences in terms of working methods:

It could be that meetings are an efficient way of reaching a solution. That may be the case, but for me, I always have a cultural resistance. You know when I have a problem, I don't think, oh let's organise a meeting and then have four or five people sitting in my office to discuss it. I don't think like that. I think to myself, 'Ah, where can I find information?' And I will go and I will look in the regulation and I will look for guidance, notes and I will check it out. And only if I really cannot find the answer, then maybe I'll go to talk to my Head of Unit. But the last thing I will think of doing is to organise a meeting of three or four of my colleagues. But I know that some of my colleagues, almost their first thing is to organise a meeting.... And the Commission itself does not have an institutional position. The Commission doesn't say you should avoid meetings or the Commission does not say you should organise meetings. They leave this very much to each individual person. (Official #13)

I asked the Commission officials I interviewed to indicate (and rank) the communication means they use the most to reach their contact persons. I aggregated the three first cited means of communication to see if Northerners and Southerners indeed differ in terms of their preference for written and oral communication channels.

TABLE 5.8 *Frequencies of Means of Communication per Region*

Region	In person	E-mail	Telephone
North	78	75	58
South	82	77	73

Even though Table 5.8 confirms that South Europeans have a somewhat stronger preference for the telephone, the face-to-face and e-mail communications seem to be almost equally preferred by North and South European officials. In line with the previous examples given in this section, I conclude that the differences are more a perception (myth) than a matter of practice (reality).

Nevertheless, the fact that the perceptions are so persistent in the minds of Commission officials deserves some more attention since officials had loads of examples to offer based on their experience in communicating with Northerners or Southerners. The *style of communication* was considered to be the most important dissimilarity affecting the networking behaviour of officials. The

## CHAPTER 5

accounts of North and South European officials on these communication aspects were so telling that I present below a selection of interview excerpts and let the officials describe the differences in their own words.

### *North Europeans said:*

These people I have chosen to be my network, self-selection you know, if I ask for something, I would get an answer. I mean that's for me quite important.... At least we can communicate quite openly and I think that's got something to do with culture. Because I have also colleagues from other cultures and when I have for the third or fourth time, sort of, go to them for one question and come back with five questions (five new ones!) then you notice, you try to find better ways of dealing with the one question you have. There is, I don't know what it is, sometimes a communication gap. (Official #9)

I think in the South ... you start with making friendly conversation and then you do this and that and then you finally end up with whatever subject it is that you really want to touch upon, ok? Whereas for the more Nordic, you would go maybe to the subject straight ahead, cutting out the crap more or less. But that is also a cultural tendency. And of course, sometimes you see that you don't match. (Official #35)

Sometimes you think 'Ok, I try to get this information in a short time'. You have two colleagues... One would be explaining two hours on the phone. The other one would explain it in fifteen minutes. So of course, I would prefer then to have this fifteen-minute short briefing. And sometimes, yeah like I said, the Latin way, it's a bit more describing in a longer way. Well it depends, but in general. (Official #113)

Let's say Northern Europeans are getting probably better along than with somebody from Italy. This is nothing negative, but there are certainly different cultural attitudes... If you ask a Dutch or a Danish or a German and you expect a yes or no response, you get a yes or no response, but if you ask somebody from the Mediterranean area, where you wouldn't... As a Northern European you expect a yes or no, you don't get a yes or no and then you're... You get a story for it and that was it! I think this is deliberate or indeliberate or however you want to say it, but this is not nationalism, this is just, I think they are a different culture.... And then probably, not deliberately, when seeking ... advice from somebody when you know, listen, there I get a clear answer rather than endless discussions. But ... this is not negative. This is simply the difference in the cultures. They would probably say the same about Scandinavians or Germans or Dutch, from them you get only yes or no and I expected some more information. Yeah probably. But don't misunderstand this. This has nothing to do with a nationalistic view. At the end of the day, this is probably Southern European and Northern European. (Official #114)



*South Europeans said:*

Usually Northern countries have a direct approach with you, more transparent. If they have to tell you something, they tell you... The French and the Belgians, it's much more difficult to understand what they really think when they're talking to you. So this is to say that nationality plays a role in communication, in networks also. The ... information I can get from certain colleagues coming from certain countries, I can directly use [it] without reprocessing it. I don't know how to say it. The information is straightforward. That's the Nordic. Of course, maybe this is different private, but in terms of working environment I feel better. That's really personal because other people just say the contrary; that they don't like the direct approach that Nordic people have. Like Swedish persons, you just talk with them at ... whatever level directly with the name, like the Commissioner.... Of course for me, it's sort of strange as an Italian.... For [the] French, it's the same.... The hierarchical aspects are very important for [the] French and Belgians. But for the Nordics hierarchy aspects are not very important. Important thing is you do certain things and say what you have done or what you have not done, what is your problem and what do you want from me. So the way of communication ... is not filtered. It's direct.... The information you get from certain people has to be filtered out, so you have to process what they say. So what exactly was he meaning with that? And information instead coming from other people, you can process it as it is.... I am very complex and messy. But in terms of work, I need things that are clear. Otherwise, I can't, I can't... I'm like a computer, if everything comes together, I cannot process it. It should be clear what I have to do, what are the messages, what I have to deliver. If this is not clear, ... I'm stuck. And also in terms of support by external people, I need ... clear answers from the persons I contact. And sometimes it's not easy with Southerners. Very strange or not? Am I atypical? (Official #53)

Well, in the beginning ... I didn't like the German people because they were so blunt and ninini, but then I learnt that you can work very well with them because you can count on them. So maybe in the beginning their attitude is a bit not so nice, but you can count on them and what they say, they will do it, while sometimes Spanish or Italians, they're always nice and hihhi, but they go away and they forget about you. And these are sometimes things you learn. (Official #59)

If you will call a Finn and if it's purely on work, you will have your reply within five minutes. When you talk to a Greek or Latin, in general, I mean they are much more, you know, they have their heart on their tongue, ... they are more talkative.... Yes, you'll certainly get more information. The question is will you get more relevant information? If you talk for hours about the birds and the bees, I mean is this relevant? It may well be that you can say that's most relevant information ..., only the Italians get more sound information than whatever... (Official #76)

To take an example, [two] (name of the British contact person) and [three] (name of the French contact person) do not have the same way of working. And I know

that, so I will address them differently. I will ask things in a different way, at different moments. [With the Brit], if I just need some information, it will take me two minutes. I will go to his room, ask him, I will get the response immediately. It's done, focused, just like that. If I go to [the French], I must have more time because she will tell me about other things. So if I am in a hurry, I will rather try to send her an e-mail for obtaining information because I do not have time to invest in a human relationship to obtain information rapidly. To the contrary, I would never have the impression that I am disturbing her. Eventually, I would feel right away if I disturb her. She would tell me more frankly. [With the Brit], I always have the impression that I am disturbing him a bit. That's it. That's cultural. [My translation] (Official #91)

What we can conclude from these interview fragments is that there is a sense of recognition and acceptance of the North-South differences by both groups. This acknowledgement leads them to adapt their behaviour according to the situation at hand and the person they are dealing with. Depending on the time pressure and the kind of information they want, they turn to Northerners or Southerners. The other remarkable observation is that the Northerners seem to prefer Northerners to Southerners, whereas the Southerners seem to appreciate both approaches and even to prefer the Northern approach. This observation is in line with previous research: "Among those from the North, there seems to be a greater sense of unease" (Abélès et al. 1993: 42, McDonald 2000: 67).

## 5.5

### The Language Issue in a Multilingual Commission

A distinctive feature of the EU as a multinational organisation is the multiplicity of its official languages. Whereas the UN has 192 member states and six official languages, the EU has 27 member states and 23 official languages. Even though the soaring translation and interpretation costs raise calls for reducing the number of official languages, "none of the Member States seem to be willing to accept either of these languages or another language as a *lingua franca* or give up their national language" (Loos 2000: 145). Language remains a sensitive issue because of its symbolic weight. One of the core mottos of the EU is 'unity in diversity' and language is considered to be a symbolic embodiment of the cultural diversity of Europe. The Commission also adopts the official point of view that language is a part of national and personal identity (idem).

This plurality in languages makes the study of how EU officials deal with this complexity of a multilingual bureaucracy a worthwhile endeavour (idem), not the least because the diversity of languages has been identified as a factor

that creates “distinctive linguistic barriers to communication within EU organisations” (Page 1997: 41). Indeed, officials told anecdotes on misunderstandings due to language (Officials #46, #95) and emphasised the extent to which it is important to make oneself understood in such a multilingual environment (Official #97). To deal with misunderstandings in a different language than their mother tongue, Commission officials adopt a flexible and relaxed approach to language (Abélès et al. 1993: 33).

You have to use a standard language and accept a standard answer and [not] be too sensitive to politeness rules or protocol rules. (Official #46)

Sometimes we receive an e-mail which can [sound] a little bit rude or too direct. In fact you should always reflect if this is his or her mother tongue or... I mean ... writing in another language is not ... so easy like writing in your proper language, mother tongue... (Official #95)

Such an approach takes account of the fact that the other person might not have meant to be rude and is helpful in avoiding relationship problems resulting from miscommunication.

Still, speaking one’s native language gives a sense of comfort: “a certain sense of relief is experienced when the person on the other end of the phone line turns out to share the same language or assumptions, so ease of communication may shape such interactions in particular directions” (Stevens and Stevens 2001: 180). As a result, “linguistic features enhance the propensity to cultivate personal networks. It is always easier to telephone or e-mail if one is sure of ready mutual comprehension” (Spence and Stevens 2006: 182). Indeed, when I asked whether nationality matters in terms of shaping networks, 46.3% of the interviewed officials claimed that it was rather language that mattered. The fact that you can speak your own language has been identified by the officials as an important factor facilitating communication (Officials #22, #88) and forming the basis for good relations (Official #10). For instance, when you do not know the other person that well, it is much easier to approach someone speaking your own language (Official #9).

Linguists assert that “There is often an amazing transformation in body language, tone of voice, facial expression and confidence when someone switches to his/her native language” (Quoted in Schneider and Barsoux 1997: 196). Commission officials are also sensitive to this aspect of speaking the native language. They accept that one can only express and understand the nuances in one’s native language (Officials #80, #81).

I think it’s definitely the same language. It’s the fine differentiation. The accentuation of the language really plays an important role. In a foreign language you can never communicate, on this sense, efficient[ly] in the same way. (Official #81)

## CHAPTER 5

It is this ease in communication that creates trust (Official #69), which becomes especially vital when asking for sensitive information (Official #81).

To what extent is this preference for the native language reflected in the choice of contact persons? Do Commission officials build a network with those who can speak their native language? To find out, the interviewed officials were asked to indicate in which language they communicate with the three officials they chose as their most important contacts.<sup>91</sup> Table 5.9 summarises the aggregated results.

TABLE 5.9: *Communication Language with Contact Persons*

Communication Language	Number of Contacts	Percentage of Total Contacts
English	126	52.3%
French	62	25.7%
German	16	6.6%
Frenghish <sup>92</sup>	13	5.4%
Italian	8	3.3%
Greek	4	1.7%
Swedish	3	1.2%
Dutch	2	0.8%
Spanish	1	0.4%
Czech	1	0.4%
Portuguese	1	0.4%
Other <sup>93</sup>	4	1.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>79/241</b>	<b>32.8%</b>

When we look at the overall picture, we see that officials speak in their native language with contacts in their network only in 32.8% of the cases. Hypothesis 3 positing that officials predominantly network with others speaking their native language is thus rejected. The three big languages also dominate the exchanges in the task-related informal networks: English tops with 52.3% of all the exchanges, followed by French (25.7%), German (6.6%) and a mixture of English and French ('Frenghish') (5.4%).

<sup>91</sup> The results should not suffer from a language bias since the respondents were given the choice between English and French for the language of the interview.

<sup>92</sup> Frenghish or Franglais is the term used to imply a mix of French and English. Commission officials either switch between the two languages or borrow words or expressions and combine these two languages (Abélès et al. 1993: 32).

<sup>93</sup> Other combinations of two languages.

Table 5.10 shows the percentage of the actual communications made in the native language per native language.

TABLE 5.10: *Communication in Native Language*

Native Language	Ratio Contacts in Native Language: Total Contacts	Percentage of Contacts in Native Language
English	15/21	71.4%
French	29/41	70.7%
Italian	7/20	35%
German	16/54	29.6%
Greek	4/21	19%
Czech	1/6	16.7%
Dutch	2/15	13.3%
Swedish	1/9	11.1%
Spanish	1/15	6.7%
Finnish	0/15	0%
Danish	0/12	0%
Portuguese	0/3	0%
Other	3/9	33.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>79/241</b>	<b>32.8%</b>

As Table 5.9 already foreshadowed, communicating in the native language is a luxury that the native speakers of English, French, Italian and German enjoy. For the native speakers of other languages, communication in the native language overlaps largely with the patterns of same nationality contacts (see Table 5.2).

English, French and German are also the official working languages of the European Commission. Previous research on the Commission argued, however, that French was the dominant language:

It is overwhelmingly the case that French dominates or is seen to dominate. There are pockets where English dominates in the Commission, in specific units or sectors (usually where the 'client' group prefers English) and where French may not be heard at all. These, however, are sufficiently exceptional to be noticeable. *'The language of the Commission is French'* is a common self-commentary in the Commission.... [S]ome Anglophones on detachment from national administrations claim that they soon realise that, when working alongside permanent officials, *'if you don't speak French, they make you feel even more that you are not one of them'*. (Abélès et al. 1993: 35-36)

More recently, scholars have marked a shift from French to English: "Until the mid 1990s French was the de facto language, but by the turn of the century

English had become the dominant, though not exclusive, working language” (Spence and Stevens 2006: 180). This trend which began with the Northern enlargement of the EU has become even stronger with the accession of the East European Member States. As one official argued, as the EU has become larger and more official languages have been added, the number of languages actually being used has decreased (Official #82).

Although official documents may be drafted in the three working languages, usually only English and French are used in daily practice. “Panacea texts” (Loos 2000: 154) drafted half in English, half in French are also common practice. The preferred language may also vary per DG. For example, the working language of DG External Relations is predominantly French, presumably reflecting the diplomatic backgrounds and traditions of this DG. DG Personnel and Administration consistently follows the official norms and sends all its circulars in three languages. However, these are rather the exceptions to the general trend. To the dismay of the Germans

The Germans are fighting a brave struggle to keep the German language alive in the Commission. But they’re not getting anywhere with it. It’s only the Austrians and the Germans. They had high hopes for the East Europeans. They all speak English. They’re very disappointed. (Official #50)

and the French, documents are increasingly produced in English. The Chief Spokesman for the former Commission President Jacques Delors estimated in an interview in 2003<sup>94</sup>: “When I left Brussels in 1995, 70% of the documents crossing my desk were written in French. Nowadays 70% are in English.” Although the French government has been organising language courses for the new Member State officials, the language battle for the French also seems to be lost:

Officials from new Member States don’t speak French, so this is a problem for the network. When I started, I took some courses and within a year I could catch up with my French because everything was going on in French. Nowadays, it’s also more difficult to catch up with French because it’s easier to just speak English. (Official #3)

Globalisation has made English the *lingua franca* as a result of which the new generations increasingly learn and speak English as a foreign language. This is also reflected in the languages the interviewed officials speak. I aggregated the responses to the question ‘Which languages do you speak fluently?’ In Table 5.11, I present the total number of officials that speak the three official working languages. When we look at these figures, we see that although English is the most popularly spoken language, French is still by far the second most spoken language.

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<sup>94</sup> *The Economist*, The galling rise of English, 1 March 2003, p. 30.

TABLE 5.11: *Popularity of the Official Working Languages*

Language	Frequency
English	81
French	75
German	37

Indeed, despite the predominance of English, it is difficult to imagine how a Commission official “could do an effective job without a working knowledge of French” (Hooghe 2001: 170). The language of meetings and conversations constantly shifts from English to French. There is an unwritten convention in the Commission that officials may choose one of these two languages when they take the floor. It may be because they feel more comfortable in English or French, but it can also simply be that they continue in the language the speaker before them has spoken in.

Within the Commission, a German speaking French to a Dutchman about a text in English does not cause surprise. Movement across linguistically defined boundaries is an everyday affair. An outsider’s surprise or admiration can bring a chuckle and a response to the effect that ‘*we don’t think about it*’.... The multilingual and mobile childhood of so many officials in the Commission makes the ‘mother tongue’ neither easy to define nor necessarily of any close relationship to the language spoken daily in the respective national context.... It is most noticeable externally when a Commission official, in front of Member State representatives, experts or MEPs<sup>95</sup>, is expected to speak his or her mother tongue. The mismatch between what this should be (judged by nationality) and the language or socio-language which the official finds easiest to use can be a source of difficulty or surprise, annoyance or admiration. (Abélès et al. 1993: 33-35)

Constantly shifting languages is rather the norm than the exception in the Commission.

In this sense, the working environment in the Commission differs visibly from those in the European Council and Parliament. Unless it is a conference or meeting involving external actors, translation and interpretation is not available in Commission meetings. By contrast, meetings in the Council and Parliament are multilingual. Participants talk and listen to each other via the simultaneous interpreters. Although not all official languages are available for interpretation, “the more formal, public and ceremonial the occasion, the more likely it is that all of the official languages will be used” (Loos 2000: 146). The issue of the availability of the texts in all the languages is also a recurring topic in Council working groups. Especially the French, German, Italian, Spanish

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<sup>95</sup> Members of the European Parliament.

and Polish delegations are keen on demanding the translation of documents in their own language. French civil servants speak strictly French in Council working groups and complain openly that they have nothing against “the language of Shakespeare” but that simplification<sup>96</sup> should not mean using one language, i.e. English. As Egeberg (2006f: 196-197) notes, “Since language tends to go together with national identity, a similar reduction to the use of only a very few languages [as in the Commission] is more difficult to foresee in the Council.”

For Commission officials, however, language is not a major issue. They accept that they “will not be working on a daily basis in their mother tongue” (Cini 1996b: 129). Although there is some dissatisfaction about the dominance of English and French, due to the fact that it gives the native speakers of these languages a relative advantage, “it does not, in practice, have too much effect on the functioning of the Commission” (Nugent 2001: 181). Commission officials are well aware that working for the Commission demands being multilingual. Consequently, language training is offered to all officials, be it a crash course in French (for the new recruits who do not speak French) or other European and foreign languages (depending usually on the needs of the person and her/his job). The incentive to learn languages has become even stronger since the personnel reform. Whilst A-level officials were already required to speak two languages to be recruited to the Commission, the new Staff Regulation has made “the ability to work in a third language” a precondition for their first promotion after recruitment.<sup>97</sup> And indeed, Commission officials are champions of speaking foreign languages as Table 5.12 demonstrates.

TABLE 5.12: *Number of Spoken Languages*

Number of Languages	Frequency	Percentage
2	9	11%
3	32	39%
4	25	30.5%
5	12	14.6%
6	4	4.9%
<b>N= 82</b>	<b>Mean= 3.63</b>	<b>Median= 3.5</b>
		<b>Mode= 3</b>

<sup>96</sup> Simplification falls under the Commission’s Better Regulation initiative, the aim of which is to reduce EU red tape by making Community legislation clear, understandable, up to date and user-friendly.

<sup>97</sup> European Communities, 2004, *Staff Regulations of Officials of the European Communities and Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Communities*, Article 45/2.



The interviewed officials speak on average 3.63 languages and the record is six languages.

Although these multilingual aptitudes of Commission officials are not reflected in the languages they use to contact their network partners, they are well aware that speaking many languages is also advantageous for the depth and width of their network. It is always a plus if you speak the language of your interlocutor (Official #22).

The more languages you master, the easier the communication. I mean clearly the French will talk to me in French and it's always better if you can talk in the native language of the person. So the more languages you master, it facilitates your communication and thus may have a positive effect on your network. (Official #76)

[The] more languages you speak, [the] more it is easy to come in touch of course, to set up a network. If you speak one and half languages here in the Commission, of course it's not enough. This is also something.... If you speak another language, which is the language of your [inter]locutor, they appreciate it ... and it opens some doors. Let's imagine you speak Maltese by chance and your [inter]locutor, he will be 'Ah!', he will like it, he will open to you, he will give you everything. How come that? Or Finnish. How come ... that you speak Finnish? Just to give an example. (Official #82)

Conversely, not speaking your languages well might be a factor that binds you to officials who speak your native language.

You will find that some people, their first thought when they reach a problem is to call somebody they know, somebody they feel comfortable with. It might be somebody who speaks their own language. We have obviously people who speak several languages very well, but we then have some colleagues who can maybe speak Spanish and they're not very comfortable in English. So when they have a problem, they will call a friend who is also Spanish and they'll say, 'Look, you know I've got this problem, how do I solve it?' I mean it does happen yeah. So you will get that in some cases, maybe Spanish colleagues who will have a network of other Spanish friends spread all over the Commission perhaps. Whereas if you speak English or French, you don't have the same problem with communication. (Official #13)

Similarly, language is not seen as a barrier for networking for officials who either speak English and/or French well (Officials #24, #115), which is the case for almost all officials as we saw in Table 5.11.

Some officials argued, however, that language only shapes networks to the extent that officials have predominantly English or French-speaking networks depending on their preference (Officials #19, #29, #73, #74, #90, #113, #117). Is there perhaps an 'English-French divide' in networks in the Commission? Presumably, such a divide would very much follow the geographic line North-South since there is a general tendency of learning and speaking languages in

## CHAPTER 5

the same language family, for example Germanic or Latin. On the whole, North Europeans are more likely to speak English whereas South Europeans are usually more fluent in French. Does the English-French divide overlap with the North-South divide?

TABLE 5.13: *Communication Language per Region*

	<b>English</b>	<b>French</b>
<b>North</b>	83	5
<b>South</b>	38	56

Looking at the frequencies of English and French as the communication language with the contact persons, we see in Table 5.13 that the English-French divide virtually mirrors the North-South divide (which had already been disproved in section 5.4 in terms of regional homophily).

Even though language lies at the heart of communication, the foregoing analysis suggests that language does not play a significant role per se in shaping the networks of Commission officials. The fact that English and French are used interchangeably in daily work, coupled with the fact that Commission officials are a multilingual crowd overcomes the barriers that language could otherwise pose. Furthermore, the analyses in this section show that the effect of language on networking behaviour is not independent of the variables nationality, size of Member State and North-South. Because language overlaps with these variables, I exclude it in the multivariate analysis explaining networks in Chapter 6.

## 5.6

### **Debunking the Myth of Nationality**

This chapter has addressed the question of whether Commission officials have predominantly national task-related informal networks with the help of quantitative and qualitative empirical data. The results can be summarised as follows. Even though many officials recognise the mechanisms that underlie homophily resulting from cultural similarities, the networks of officials are not culturally homophilic. Firstly, national networks are a myth when it comes to the networks of Commission officials at work.

There are lots of stereotypes about the Commission.... Especially at the level of officials, it is a bit of a myth, national networks... [My translation] (Official #54) Secondly, even though the cultural differences between the North and South are very present in the minds and perceptions of Commission officials, the con-

tacts within and between the North and South groups are almost evenly distributed.

Of course, people maybe are different if they come from the North or from the South ..., but I don't think that influences our work. No, I don't see anything of that. (Official #71)

Thirdly, the daily usage of languages in the Commission transcends language barriers. English and French are not only the working languages but also the networking languages.

If your colleagues, for example Dutch, talk to you in French, one cannot really say that language really plays a role. [My translation] (Official #115)

The bivariate analyses in this chapter have also identified the variables size of Member State and North-South as variables that need to be tested further in a multivariate equation in order to explain the networks. How can we explain the fact that Commission officials' networks are not shaped by nationality? If not nationality, then what? Which factors make contacting compatriots impossible or irrelevant in the Commission?