

Book: Political Leadership and the European Commission Presidency

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Questionnaire for EU Officials

Introduction

Thank you very much for your willingness to be interviewed. I would also be very grateful for your permission to record our conversation to be able to go back to it afterwards, though I completely understand if that is not possible.

Overview of Interview

The European Commission presidency is one of the most senior and longest-established political positions at the European level. Its most puzzling aspect is however its actual political powers. Although the office mainly lacks the institutional resources to provide political leadership, it cannot effectively function without any demonstration of leadership. As a result, incumbents have exercised the office quite differently throughout the process of European integration. At the center of this research project are the performances of three Commission presidents: Walter Hallstein, Jacques Delors, and José Barroso.

The interview will focus on those presidents that the interviewee has experienced during their work in Brussels.

The questions will revolve around five main areas:

- 1 General information about the interviewee
- 2 *Agenda-setting* leadership of the relevant president
- 3 *Mediative-Institutional* leadership of the relevant president
- 4 *Public* leadership of the relevant president
- 5 Additionally: General impression of the office of Commission presidency
- 6 Final remarks

In case of time constraints, the interview will focus on points 2–4.

1 Information about the Interviewee

1: Whom of the three incumbents (Hallstein/Delors/Barroso) have you worked with during your time in Brussels?

2: What have/had been your position(s) during the incumbency of X? For how long?

3: When did you first meet X? Respectively, how would you describe your working relationship with X (worked closely together/at a distant observation)?

2 Agenda-setting leadership of the relevant president

4: From your experience with X, do you think that X had a concrete vision or political ambitions for Europe, and if so what would they have been?

5: From your perspective, did X fulfill successfully the office's requirement of providing political guidelines and deliver on policy priorities of the Commission? If so/if not why?

6: What are the three most important political topics/policy areas that you identify with X?

7: Why do you think X had chosen these particular political topics/policy areas?

8: From your perception, how would you describe X's rhetoric and communicative skills in addressing his agenda, e.g. in the Commission, the European Parliament and Council but also in the public spheres?

3 Mediating-Institutional leadership of the relevant president

Personality

9: Is there a particular personal characteristic you always connect with X?

10: From your perception, could you describe particular strengths and weaknesses in the behavior of X?

11: Did you perceive a certain personal authority on the part of X? If so, could you describe this personal authority in greater detail (political reputation/political judgment)?

Interaction/Mediation

12: What was your perception of how X presented the topics/policy issues he wanted to discuss at the meeting/or which were on the meeting's agenda (inside the Commission)? Respectively, how did he present his agenda in the European Parliament and at Council summits?

13: In cabinet or college meetings, the president is the main guide of the conversation. How did you experience X's guidance?

13.a: Respectively for other interviewees outside the Commission: Did X guide the conversation? How did you experience X's guidance? Can you remember particular situations/occasions?

14: How did you experience the atmosphere in the College meetings? Did X try to pursue a positive working atmosphere among his staff, the Commissioners, civil servants, and other EU officials? If yes, how did he do it?

15: There are different ways to influence and persuade staff members, commissioners, civil servants, or other EU representatives in order to convince them of particular issues/topics. How did X convince others of certain proposals or political ideas? What kind of strategies did X use?

16: More generally, did you have the feeling that X behaved differently towards different groups? And if so, did this behavior change over time? Why?

17: How did X deal with contradicting opinions/arguments? How did you experience that X mediated/built consensus among contradicting positions? Can you remember specific occasions?

18: Did you have the feeling that X could handle criticism? And vice versa, how did X criticize colleagues, staff etc.?

Management of the Commission

19: From your perspective, how did X manage and coordinate the Commission? How was the Commission under X perceived in the European Parliament?

20: Did you have the impression that X succeeded in coordinating and managing the Commission's tasks properly? Can you give any examples?

4 Public leadership of the relevant president

21: How did X represent the Commission towards EC/Council of Ministers/EP?

22: What kind of image did X create of the Commission towards the other institutions?

23: In your perception, how did X defend the Commission in the EU system before the EC/Council of Ministers/EP?

24: From your perception, how did X present his ideas/political issues before EC/Council of Ministers/EP?

25: How did X represent the Commission towards the European/national public spheres?

26: Every president interprets his/her role as head of the Commission differently. How did you perceive the office's interpretation by X?

5 Additionally: General impression of the office of the Commission presidency

27: What kind of role, do you think, does the Commission presidency play in the European political system? Why?

28: What do you think are the most important tasks of the Commission president vis-à-vis the Commission and other political institutions at European level (Council/Parliament)?

29: What do you think are the most important political issues/policy areas, in which the Commission president should have influence/or be involved? Why?

30: In what respect, do you think, is the institutional context of the presidency most enhancing or most constraining? Why?

31: Do you think the position of the presidency should have more or less institutional and political powers? Why?

32: Do you think that other important political offices in the EU, such as the permanent Council president, the High Representative of the EU external relations, or the president of the European Parliament, help or hinder the Commission president in assuming a leading role?

33: Are there any particular personal characteristics/biographical backgrounds a president should always have? And never? In other words, what does a president need in order to be successful regarding their political ambitions, political and institutional abilities, and political capital?

34: The situational environment means the general political situation in Europe. When do you think the political situation enhances the leadership aspects of the president's role? Conversely, when is it more constraining?

35: To what extent, do you think, are the incumbents of the Commission presidency able to provide political leadership inside/outside the European Commission? Do you think that the president should exert more or less such leadership? Why?

6 Final remarks

36: Could you refer me to other people within the Commission (e.g. Commissioners, cabinet members, directorates-general) or members from the Sec-Gen, as well as outside the Commission (e.g. members of the European Parliament/Council/Council of Ministers) who might be willing to be interviewed?

37: Is there anything that you would like to add to further understanding of the performance of this Commission president and the role of the Commission presidency within the EU institutional framework?