



The Eye of the Tiger

On personnel selection and the survival of the fittest candidates at the E.C.; will old communists and other New Europeans stand a chance getting into this Old European bastion?

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Reijer Gaasterland
Utrecht University

Introduction

Europe has been divided for a long time. But in a couple of days Eastern and Western Europe will be united in a Union of 25, a memorable event. This enlargement of the European Union will be the largest and most complex to this date. The European Commission plays an active role in the enlargement process. This 'tiger' is at the heart of the European Union system of governance.¹ It drafts proposals for new European laws, which it presents to the European Parliament and the Council. It makes sure that E.U. decisions are properly implemented and supervises the way E.U. funds are spent. It's also seen as the main defender of the European treaties and European law. Thus the Commission plays an important role in many decision-making processes. Considering that important role, staffing the Commission with nationals from all European Union countries has been common practice since the fifties of the past century. In the European Commission multinational staffing is done in a way that geographical balance is ensured. Although this is a noble principle and it can be found in the Staff Regulations of the European Commission, those same regulations state: No posts shall be reserved for nationals of any specific member state. This seemed contradictionary to me and left me wondering how the European institutions are coping with matters of personnel in an expanding Union. Personnel selection has very clear aspects of inclusion and exclusion to it; some people are selected and others are left out. Since processes within the institutions of the E.U. are not a topic that have received much academic interest in the past, this paper wants to add the *Intra-Institutional dimension* to the discussion about in- and exclusion in an expanding European Union.²

¹ Compare: N.Nugent (2001): *At the Heart of the Union*, Macmillan Press, London, p 6.

² Compare: M. W. Bauer (2002): *Reforming the European Commission – A (missed?) Academic Opportunity*, *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)* Vol. 6 N° 8, <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2002-008a.htm>

Research question

Expanding the Union means expanding the number of personnel at the institutions as well. Considerably more work has to be done at the institutions in an E.U. of 25. At this moment the Commission has a relatively small workforce consisting of about 19.000 permanent civil servants.³ It has a hard time doing their job in the Union of 15 already. Although the expansion of the workforce was already in the picture before the enlargement; with more countries becoming a member of the Union, the urge for a higher number of personnel has become even more evident. Euro commissioner Kinnock, responsible for personnel and administration matters, has pleaded for about 3500 extra permanent posts, on top of the already existing 19000. This expansion of the workforce leads to questions: How does the European Commission select its new employees? How does it ensure the geographical balance with regard to other staff policies? What chances do people from new and old E.U. countries get when entering the selection procedure? What are the formal and informal requirements candidates have to live up to? These questions have lead to the following research question:

In the context of EU-enlargement; to what extent does the recruitment procedure of permanent civil servants lead to in- and exclusion at the European Commission?

This research question will function as a guideline throughout this paper. To answer it some relevant aspects of the organizational system and personnel policy of the European Commission are subject of study. The formal requirements to participate in a competition will be discussed. The competition process is explained. The informal requirements for candidates receive attention as well. The process of dividing the posts and recruitment from old and new member states will be studied. Finally a profile of the ideal candidate will be presented.

The information gathered here derives from Internet sources, literature and interviews that took place in the writing of my final thesis.

Organizational system and recruitment policy

Although the Commission is often mentioned as being one entity; it has a political and an administrative arm. The political arm is currently consisting of a College of 20 Commissioners, the administrative arm consists about 24.000 permanent and temporary civil servants. The Commission's staff is organised into 36 departments, known as "Directorates-General" (DG's) and "services" (such as the Legal Service). This paper will focus on the administrative arm.

The recruitment of officials from all member states is standard practice in all international administrative bureaucracies, including that of the European Communities where it dates back to the formation of the Coal and Steel

³ Compare: http://europa.eu.int/epso/brochures/cee_nl.pdf

Community in 1952 (Michelmann,1977).⁴ Since the principle of multinational staffing was introduced, geographical balance has been an important issue within the personnel policy. The principle of geographical balance has been laid down in article 27 paragraph 1 of the Staff Regulations which states that “recruitment shall be directed to be securing for the institution the services of officials of the highest standards of ability, efficiency and integrity, recruited on the broadest possible geographical basis from among nationals of Member States of the communities”.⁵ However paragraph 3 of the same article limits the commission’s discretionary power to the extent that “no post shall be reserved for nationals of any specific Member State”.⁶ The Court of First instance has given a clear interpretation of this rule: under the Staff Regulations as they stand, nationality considerations may be invoked only to distinguish between candidates whose qualifications are equivalent.⁷

Procedures of personnel policy at the Commission are highly formalized. The E.C. keeps a system running that has most similarities with a so called career system. Within this system the civil servant enters the service at the lowest level of a career for which he has sufficient knowledge and education and is promoted according to a specific and regulated system. The civil servant usually remains in his/her career until retirement. To feed the system the E.C. holds periodic open competitions (concours) like Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain do.⁸

Part of the career system are the grades. There are 4 basic grades. Each grade is subdivided into different levels (usually 1-8) and each level into a series of steps for salary purposes. Candidates can apply to enter any grade, for which they are qualified, but must be able to produce the necessary certificate(s) to prove their qualification(s). When they have worked as permanent officials for a number of years, staff can take internal competitions to move from one grade to another, when they possess the necessary educational qualifications.⁹

A Grades: Senior staff - the planners, the negotiators and managers

- entry qualification: university degree. Most – but not all – university degrees are accepted by the Institutions.
- some professional experience may be required for A7 competitions and above.
- no professional experience is needed for an A8 concours. However, for some - but not all - A8 competitions candidates should have obtained

⁴ Michelmann, H.J. (1978): Multinational staffing and organizational functioning in the Commission of the European Communities, *International Organization* **32**: 477-496.

⁵ See http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/personnel_administration/statut/tocen100.pdf

⁶ See annex 2

⁷ 436/5 communication of Mr. Kinnock to the Commission
http://europa.eu.int/comm/reform/pdf_en/sec_2003_0436_en.pdf

⁸ For an explanation of careersystems: Bossaert, Demmke, Nomden en Polet (2001): *Civil Services in the Europe of Fifteen, trends and new developments*, EIPA, Maastricht

⁹ See: <http://www.eu-careers.com/workingfortheeu.htm>

the degree giving access to the competition within 3 years preceding the date the concours is launched.

- the “A” Grade includes more than 50% of the permanent staff.
- this grade also includes Interpreters and Translators (“LA” Grade).
- it starts at A8 and goes up to A1.
- most “A” grade staff achieve a number of promotions during their careers (e.g. an official starting as an A8 would normally expect to reach A4 and possibly higher).
- there is a wide range of jobs available in this grade.
- “A” Grade officials formulate policy, plan activities and/or monitor compliance by the Member States with EU legislation.

B Grades - the supervisors

- entry qualification: successfully completed advanced secondary education
- starts at B5 and goes up to B1
- at this level you may find that you are:
 - controlling small groups of staff
 - planning tasks for your team
 - assisting an A Grade official on policy matters
 - organising meetings, visits etc.

C Grades - clerical/secretarial staff

- entry qualification: successfully completed lower secondary education or equivalent
- starts at C5 and goes up to C1
- candidates could become:
 - a secretary to a senior official;
 - preparing important documents for signature;
 - typing correspondence and dealing with phone calls;
 - providing administrative support to the Chairman of a recruitment board;
 - working as part of a team setting up an aid project for the Balkans.

D Grades - messengers, paper keepers etc.

- entry qualification: successfully completed primary education

- starts at D4 and goes up to D1¹⁰

EPSO

The first part of the personnel selection, the tests, are mainly carried out by the European Personnel and Selection Office (EPSO). Its mission is to organise open competitions to select highly qualified staff for recruitment to all institutions of the European Union, namely the European Parliament, the Council, the European Commission, the Court of Justice, the Court of Auditors, the Economic and Social Committee the Committee of the Regions and the European Ombudsman. EPSO became fully operational on 1 January 2003.¹¹ The Office pools the resources of the different European institutions so that the recruitment of EU officials is better planned and organised. People interested in working for any of the EU institutions can only apply to EPSO. This makes it easier to plan competitions and to guarantee uniform recruitment standards and principles. EPSO also helps individual institutions organise specific recruitment campaigns, for instance for temporary or auxiliary jobs. Because all the institutions need more staff to cope with the increased workload generated by the forthcoming enlargement EPSO's first priority is therefore to organise enlargement-related competitions, which are taking place as from 2003. New competition rounds are usually advertised in national newspapers and on the internet.¹² People who want to become a candidate have to mail their application to EPSO. EPSO decides if a person can enter the competition. It must be noted that candidates from countries with a career system have their numbers in favor of them. Apparently they are more used to the procedure and what it takes to get in.

Formal requirements to work at the Commission

One way of excluding applicants is to set formal requirements candidates have to fulfill. To work for the EU institutions people need to:

- be EU nationals; although the institutions sometimes recruit staff from candidate member states before they have formally joined the EU.
- have a thorough knowledge of one official EU language and a satisfactory knowledge of another; This does not mean one has to be fluent in a second language
- possess the required educational qualifications, depending on the grade
- have fulfilled any military service requirements in their own country
- of highest efficiency, integrity and ability

These formal requirements follow from the Staff regulations.¹³ They are interpreted in a very strict way. In case an applicant misses out on one of them

¹⁰ See <http://www.eu-careers.com/workingfortheeu.htm>

¹¹ See http://europa.eu.int/epso/index_en.htm

¹² See http://europa.eu.int/epso/index_en.htm

¹³ See http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/personnel_administration/statut/tocen100.pdf

he/she will not be invited for the competition. The formal requirements reflect on what the Commission sees as a good civil servant. Some of the requirements mentioned are hard to check upon in the application procedure. The competition process plays an important role for those. The last requirement mentioned (of highest efficiency, integrity and ability) is elaborated upon in the Staff regulations. A standard is set for efficiency, integrity and ability in the duties a civil servant has to fulfill (articles 11-25 staff regulations). For example: employees have to live in or near Brussels or Luxembourg. This doesn't seem to be a problem though: there is a relatively large part of Greeks working at the Commission.

The competition process

The competition process is, from the start on, all about in- and exclusion. It is a true survival of the fittest. Out of tens of thousands of applicants only 100 to 150 will get a post when put on the reserve list. Competitions are usually held in a specific field (for example law, economics, etc.). A selection board is set up to monitor the process. It consists of people from the Institutions with knowledge of the field, people from EPSO and people from outside the institutions. They are selected from the grade they need the candidates at.

There are 3 stages to each competition:

- Pre-selection tests
- Written tests
- Interview

Examination centers in which the tests take place are frequently set up in each member state. The interviews are generally held in Brussels or Luxembourg.¹⁴

The pre-selection test

There are specialized competitions and general competitions. Specialized tests occur more often and are taken as an example here.

The preselection test consists of a(n)

1. Specialized field test (e.g. law, accountancy, economics, human resources, etc.)
 - you need to have a good knowledge of your specialized subject: the test is set by experts in the field
 - the test is sometimes combined with the EU Knowledge test
 - this test is usually taken in your second language
2. EU knowledge test
 - this requires an extremely thorough knowledge of the EU, its history, its institutions, their powers, plus important treaties and influential people

¹⁴ Compare: <http://www.eu-careers.com/workingfortheeu.htm>

- may be combined with either the field or the language test
- this test is usually taken in your second language

3. Verbal & numerical understanding test

- this is generally a combination of verbal (two-thirds) and numerical (one-third) questions .
- the verbal questions test by giving you a series of texts and asking you to pick the answer which best summarizes or matches a selected part of the text.
- the numerical questions test your ability to interpret information from simple graphs and charts and to carry out some mental arithmetic.
- some of the numerical questions are pure "word problems" where no graphic is involved.
- this test is usually taken in your second language, as indicated on your application form.

These tests are to ensure candidates are of the highest level of intelligence. The test results give an indication of the abilities the candidates have. It is important to make sure the candidate is able to function on a high level within the Commission. The tests are seen as legitimate way of excluding 'people that are not good enough'.

Stage 2: Written tests

These tests frequently consists of one or two essays, often based on a dossier of information candidates are given. The subject matter relates directly to the field of the competition. If a dossier test is not used, you are given some questions, on which to write one or two essays. Often you are given a choice of questions. Sometimes you are asked to write a summary of one of your essays in your second language. The candidates scoring the best on the written test are admitted to the next stage - the interview. Sometimes the Recruitment Board simply picks the candidates, who produce the best results in their essay(s). On other occasions, however, their mark in this Written Test is added to their mark in the Specialized Field Test (see above) and those candidates with the best aggregate marks are then invited to the interview.

The essays show what view the candidates have of Europe. Are they realistic? Do they have insight in European processes and a certain Europe mindedness? Is the candidate able to select and present information in a clear way? The essays fulfill an important role in the process of selection. On basis of the results of tests and essays some candidates are invited for interviews. Two

independent persons mark the anonymous essays. The essays are anonymous so the persons marking it will not be able to have prejudices.¹⁵

Stage 3: The interview

The interview is usually held at the institution itself. The interview panel ranges from 3 to 8 people. Interviews tend to last up to 45 minutes and, though they are mainly in the candidates mother tongue, they will generally be asked to speak for a few minutes in their second language. In the interview the selection board has to keep the advertisement on which the candidates reacted in mind. They can test the candidates only on the criteria that were mentioned. Every topic is discussed for about ten minutes. Ususally they discuss knowledge of the field. Then they talk about the function. They do so in order to make sure the candidate has the right ideas about the work that has to be done. They talk about the multicultural environment one has to deal with when working at the Commission and about European politics. Candidates have to know what's going on in the European Union. On the basis of the interviews a selection is made of people that will be put on the reserve list.¹⁶

The reserve list

The names of successful interviewees are published on a reserve list, which appears in the Official Journal of the Institutions. Admission to a reserve list does not guarantee a job. Once there are candidates on the reservelist persons from different units come by and check upon the results of the candidates, look in their CV's and check upon their nationality. A certain unit may be in need for a Spanish person for example because there are only two Spanish people working at that unit. The Spanish persons that seem to fit best are invited to talk with people from the unit and one is chosen.

Candidates are strongly advised to contact the Units/Directorates where they wish to work, themselves as well. Such lobbying can often get them a job much more quickly than waiting for someone from the institution to contact them. Candidates can apply for any position, as long as it is at the grade of their concours. Recruits can sometimes obtain posts, which have little or no connection with their qualifications. It is even possible for a successful candidate to obtain a job in a different EU Institution.

National connections within the institutions can help a big deal in this stadium. Persons without any connections or missing the ability to network have a big chance to become excluded. The reservelist stays until a new recruitment procedure in the specific field is started.¹⁷

¹⁵ Information deriving from an interview with a selection board member

¹⁶ Information deriving from interviews with selection board members and E.C. civil servants

¹⁷ Information deriving from an interviews with selection board member and E.C. civil servants

Informal requirements to work at the Commission

Besides the formal requirements that derive from the Staff regulations requirements deriving from the advertisement play an important role in the recruitment process. From the written stage on they become the main reason to select people. The advertisement usually contains some vague notions like 'being able to function in a multicultural environment'. The persons who mark the essays and the selection board have to decide if the candidates gives the 'right' answers. Some of the formal notions are filled in in an informal way.

Preferred candidates are:

- (European) open minded (culturally)
- European minded; they have to know European politics
- preferably women since the balance between the sexes isn't even yet
- able to function in a bureaucracy
- young (since the age limit is abolished this should not be a requirement but a person from a selection board told me it still is especially at the lower entry levels)
- able to work hard. People working at the Commission usually work under a lot of pressure. People who cannot handle the pressure will fall out. Therefore the selection board wants to know how a candidate wants to manage his/her function.¹⁸

The Commission is striving for equal treatment of men and women in the Commission and has set up a range of policy measures to give women a better chance within the Union (job sharing, quite long maternity leave etc.) Recently the age limit (was 45) was abolished as well. Persons that are handicapped can apply for a job as long as not too extensive measures have to be taken to let the person function.

Recruitment from the new member states

Reconsidering the question of geographical balance and the Staff regulations stating that no job shall be reserved for nationals of any specific member state. At each previous enlargement, a value for the relative share of commission human resources was established. This value was based on negotiations, comparisons between old and new member states and occasionally made reference to objective criteria such as population and GDP¹⁹. Although population is still seen as a valid criterion, GDP is no longer considered as an adequate criterion since nearly all of the ten candidate countries have at present a per capita GDP lower than that of any of the existing member state. It should be

¹⁸ Information deriving from an interviews with selection board member and E.C. civil servants

¹⁹ Gross domestic product

noted that the combined GDP of the 10 new Member States accounts for only 4.4% of the total GDP of the enlarged Union.²⁰

Underlining the criteria of diverse representation Eurocommssioner Kinnock has asked the Council to make an exception on the rule of art. 27 part 3 which stated that “no post shall be reserved for nationals of any specific Member State”. He pleaded for an exception since the enlargement was an exceptional situation. The council agreed on his arguments and permitted him to follow a special procedure proposed by him. The procedure had to make sure the geographical balance would be maintained therefore the following three criteria were used:

- The number of inhabitants
- The weighing of votes in the council
- The number of seats in the parliament.²¹

Applying these criteria brought the relative overall share of posts on 21.6% of the total. At a total of 23894 posts, 5161 posts would be for candidates from new countries of which 3441 are permanent. Since the admission date of 1 may 2004 became known, a number of posts has been earmarked for participants of the new countries. For officials open competitions are organised by nationality. Management posts earmarked for enlargement selections will cover all enlargement countries except for A1 posts since every country has at least one person at an A1 post.²² Because of the exception that is made special rules apply on the personnel selection of candidates from new member states until 31 december 2010. In the new member states special procedures are set up to recruit personnel for the Institutions. The same rigorous selection procedures that are used in normal procedures will continue to apply to all recruitments. Expectations from the kabinetchef of personnel and administration: even after the first enlargement gulf candidates from new member states will have good chances. They are well educated; know a lot about EU law and policy because of the transition period and posses vivid EU enthusiasm in contrast to many candidates from the old EU states.

Total staff recruited from entering member states
(including middle& senior managers)²³

Malta 2.4%	83
Cyprus 3.2%	110
Estonia 3.4%	117
Slovenia 3.9%	134
Latvia 4.5%	155
Lithuania 7.0%	241

²⁰ See: http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/personnel_administration/human_resources_nl.htm

²¹ See <http://www.evropska-unie.cz/eng/article.asp?id=1941>

²² 436/5 communication of Mr. Kinnock to the Commission
http://europa.eu.int/comm/reform/pdf_en/sec_2003_0436_en.pdf

²³ http://europa.eu.int/comm/reform/pdf_en/sec_2004_0253_en.pdf

Slovakia 8.1%	279
Hungary 14.2%	489
Czech Republic 14.3%	492
<u>Poland 39.0%</u>	<u>1341</u>
Total 100.0%	3441

Recruitment from old member states

Besides the special selection procedures in entering states, normal procedures, open to candidates from the old EU states, continue as well. The recruitment in the old states remains necessary to fill the places from people retiring or leaving. People from old member states are in this way not excluded from jobs at the Union during the enlargement process.²⁴

Ideal candidate

Generally spoken, one might say that the Commission is in need for:

- Women; there are still much more men working at the commission
- Originating from a state of the European Union, preferably new member states; in order to reach the goal of geographical balance
- With the highest standards on efficiency, integrity and ability; candidates have to be of the best quality
- Multilingual; in order to be efficient
- Right educational background (depends upon grade).
- Europe minded; candidates have to be loyal to the European Union and its principles of
- Used to a bureaucratic system or easily adjusting to it
- Young
- Able to work hard

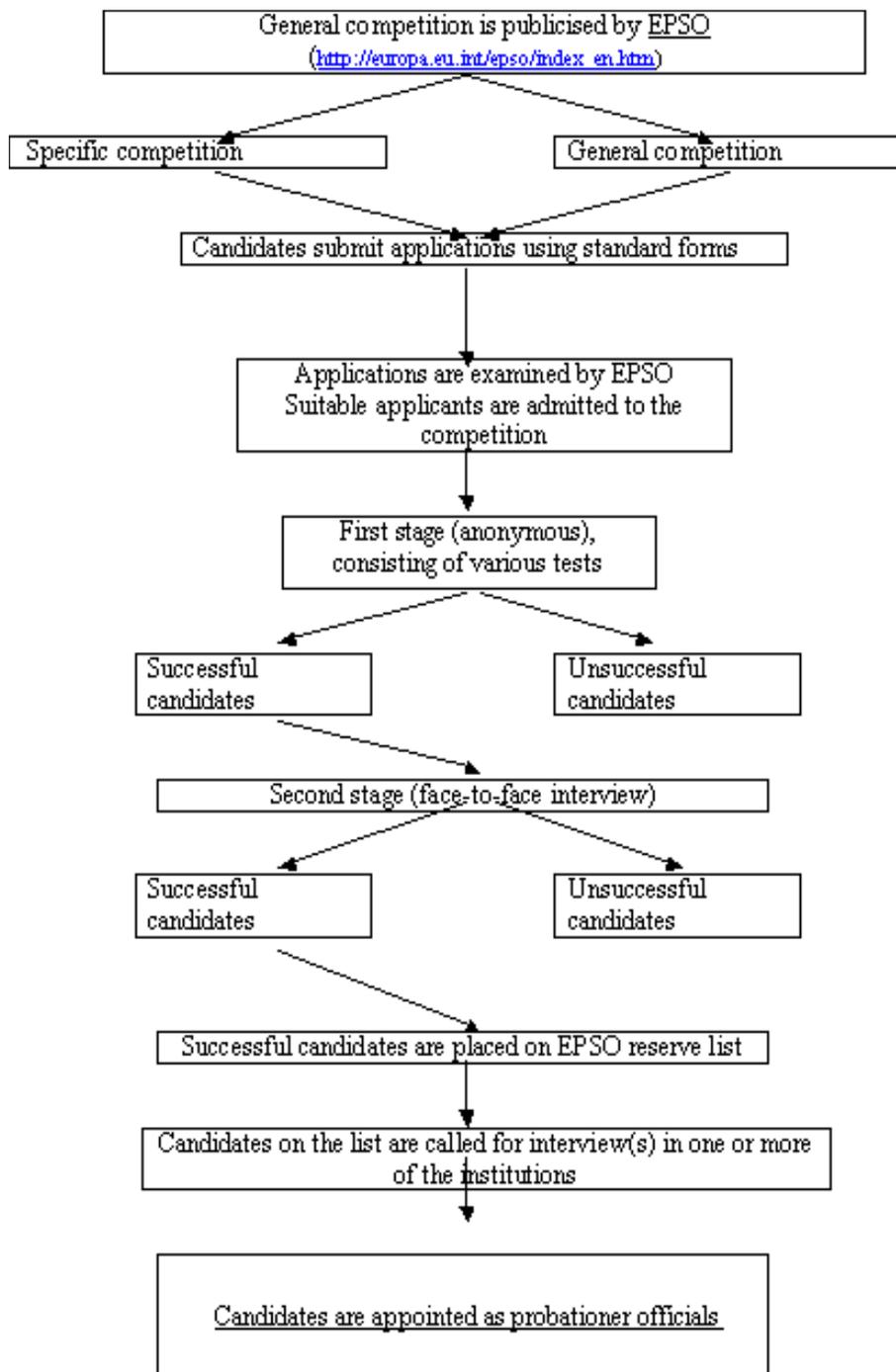
Conclusion and recommendations

The Commission seems to have found a way to let people from all member states play a role in the institutions. It has temporarily left its regulation that no person from a specific member state can be appointed. In that way she is truly trying to assure multinational staffing. Although the Commission should check if the age requirement isn't still used by selection boards no other big groups seem to be left out for reasons that are unfair. Still a few recommendations to the Commission:

²⁴ Information deriving from interviews

- The Commission has to bear in mind that its workforce is constantly changing. In the future the geographical balance should be maintained. The E.C. should therefore continue to stimulate people from countries that are relatively underrepresented. Special attention has to be given to the candidates from countries in which a career system with concours is not common practice.
- In order to provide geographical balance in a true sense the EU institutions should consider new institutions to be located in a new member state since all the institutions are at the moment located in Western Europe.
- Since exceptions on the staff regulations can be made; consider a special recruitment round for women since they are still quite underrepresented (21% of the workforce).

The procedure



Some staff regulations concerning recruitment

Article 27

Recruitment shall be directed to securing for the institution the services of officials of the highest standard of ability, efficiency and integrity, recruited on the broadest possible geographical basis from among nationals of Member States of the Communities.

Officials shall be selected without distinction as to race, political, philosophical or religious beliefs, sex or sexual orientation and without reference to their marital status or family situation. No posts shall be reserved for nationals of any specific Member State.

Article 28

An official may be appointed only on condition that:

- (a) he is a national of one of the Member States of the Communities, unless an exception is authorised by the appointing authority, and enjoys his full rights as a citizen;
- (b) he has fulfilled any obligations imposed on him by the laws concerning military service;
- (c) he produces the appropriate character references as to his suitability for the performance of his duties;
- (d) he has, subject to Article 29(2), passed a competition based on either qualifications or tests, or both qualifications and tests, as provided for in Annex III;
- (e) he is physically fit to perform his duties; and
- (f) he produces evidence of a thorough knowledge of one of the languages of the Communities and of a satisfactory knowledge of another language of the Communities to the extent necessary for the performance of his duties.