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in Denmark, Germany and Sweden**

- An Institutional Policy Perspective -

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Abstract

The paper analyses the processes of central government coordination in Denmark, Germany and Sweden. First it gives an account of the existing coordination patterns, second it analyses changes within these coordination patterns over time and finally it asks, whether these changes can be attributed to an intentional institutional design. To answer this set of questions, we introduce an institutional policy analytic perspective to the study of central government change. This perspective focuses on central actors, interests, strategic motivations and the degree of the actors` reflexivity as a promoter of intentional institutional change in government coordination.

The empirical analysis shows the prevalence of negative coordination as the dominant pattern of coordination in all three countries. However, country-specific constitutional and political traditions result in a variety of different coordination techniques actually used. The paper concludes by identifying three different patterns of change, depending on the degree of change and the reflexivity involved : “fragmented institutional politics” in Denmark, “policy-driven institutional politics” in Germany and “adaptive and symbolic institutional politics” in the case of Sweden.

1. Introduction¹

During the 1970s governmental coordination was considered a ‘hot issue’ in both academia and among governmental practitioners in the Western countries (cf. e.g. Pressman/Wildavsky 1973; Mayntz/Scharpf 1975, Siedentopf 1976). The discussion had been driven forward by the prominent planning debate, which was mainly interested in improving the policy making process in order to enable governments to take long-term societal developments into account as well as the “real” interdependencies of societal problems. In Germany, for example, such an approach was labelled “active policy” (Mayntz/Scharpf 1975).

However, it is generally assumed that the planning debate never resulted in long-term organisational changes. At least in Germany, the academic interest in central government coordination faded as the ambitious planning visions began to fail (Döhler 2001, p. 18). To a lesser extent, this statement also holds true for the case of Denmark. Lately, however, an increasing interest in coordination throughout the Western world can be observed (for an overview, cf. Six 2004, also: Painter/Pierre 2005). Nevertheless, there is still a lack of comprehensive empirical accounts for horizontal coordination among ministries in non-Westminster countries.

This paper has two aims: first, to present a framework for the analysis of coordination and propose the concept of institutional policy as a scheme for interpreting the changes observed, rather than a mere explanatory framework; second, to present an empirical account of central government coordination processes, mainly informed by the available literature (rather than the presentation of new data).

Thus, this paper is set to answer three questions: (1) how do the central governments coordinate in Denmark, Sweden and Germany, (2) did those coordination processes change over time and (3) what is the logic behind these changes?

The paper will be structured as follows. We will first elaborate an analytical framework for the analysis of central government coordination, allowing for interpretation from an institutional policy perspective. Second, we analyse the coordination processes in three case-

¹ This paper is a slightly revised version of a paper presented at the XIV NOPSAs-conference, 11 – 13 August 2005, Reykjavik, Iceland. We would like to thank Marian Döhler, Julia Fleischer, Kai Wegrich, Michael Hallsworth and Hans Henrik Østergaard for critical and helpful comments and Thomas Vogelpohl for technical assistance.

studies (Denmark, Sweden and Germany) and interpret each from an institutional policy perspective. Third, we conclude by comparing our findings from these case studies. As the country-specific chapters offer a rather extensive description, the hurried reader might wish to concentrate on the two concluding sections in each country study.

2. Coordination and Institutional Policy: Analytical Framework

2.1 Institutional Policy

Institutional policy refers to the intentional design of the institutional foundations of a politico-administrative system by influencing the interaction among governmental actors. ‘Institutions’² constitute the objects towards which the activities of institutional politics are directed. Efforts are directed towards changing the machinery of government or, in other words, towards controlling and directing the rules of interaction within central government. Thus, we argue, ‘institutions’ can conceptually be treated as an ordinary policy domain such as e.g. health, labour and environment. Accordingly, a policy-focused perspective on institutional change in central government can be used,³ focusing on the different actors, their interests and strategic motivations (cf. Scharpf 1997). We distinguish between “institutional policy” as the concept to be interpreted and “institutional politics” as any activities intended to change governmental interactions.

Usually, there is no single actor responsible for institutional policy within central government. From time to time departments for public sector (reform) (e.g. *civildepartement* in Sweden) pop up, but they are hardly powerful or influential enough to monopolize institutional policy within the core executive. Thus, we can expect institutional policy to be influenced by different actors, more precisely different departments or the prime minister’s office. For assorting actors’ interests, we differentiate between three main interests (similar: Jann et al. 2005, p. 6). First, an actor can be interested in increasing the government’s capacity to govern, and thus in producing “better” policies. Or second, actors could be motivated by an institutional self-interest in improving their own power position within central government. Or third, actors could be interested in pursuing institutional change as part of a goal related to the respective policy domain.

However, from an institutional policy perspective we are mainly interested in whether institutional change is brought about intentionally and deliberately. This perspective relates to a strand of literature that investigates the consequences of institutional change on different features of the political system (cf. Hesse/Benz 1990, Nedelmann 1995), the convertibility of

² We work with a relatively wide concept of institutions that covers formal as well as informal institutions and includes cognitive and cultural factors (March/Olsen 1989, Scott 1995).

³ We are fully aware that there are certain peculiarities to “institutional policy” as a policy domain, such as e.g. blurred boundaries between a steering subject and object or a weak linkage with organized interests (cf. Jann et al. 2005, pp. 22).

political institutions (cf. Benz 1990, for an overview cf. Jann et al. 2005, pp. 12), or the dynamics of institutional change (Czada/Schimank 2000).⁴ Elsewhere, this perspective has been termed “reflexive government” (Dean 1999), “meta-governance” or “third-order-governing” (Kooiman 2000).

However, even though we apply the concept of institutional policy in order to analyse changing coordination in central government, we still leave room for alternative modes of institutional change (as suggested by Czada/Schimank 2000), conceptualising those mainly as emergent institutional dynamics resulting in incremental change.⁵ The main criterion we distinguish alongside “institutional policy” is “reflexivity”. Reflexivity often raises the question: do we see actors intentionally changing governmental interaction by redesigning coordination techniques as objects of institutional politics?

2.2 Central government coordination

Coordination has widely been discussed in the political science/public administration literature (for an overview see Six 2004), but the discussion has not yet agreed upon a “state-of-the-art” definition that allows an analytical, empirical inquiry into central government. To quote Peters, “this term (coordination, TH) is used with almost universal approbation but less often defined” (1998, p. 296, for different definitions cf. Davis 1997, Six 2004).

We refer to “coordination” as the attempt to produce coherent government policies and achieve a state that minimizes conflicts that arise between different government organisations (mainly ministries) over programs, proposals or legislative bills. ‘Coherent government policies’ refer to political programs (before passed to parliament) that are free of contradictions both within every single policy and in the whole of governmental programs. Thus, we focus on coordination as a process of inter-organisational conflict-resolving, which becomes manifest in certain coordination techniques.

⁴ Other strands of literature concerned with governmental change can be identified, such as the whole discussion of administrative reform (cf. Pollitt/Bouckaert 2000) or more theoretically oriented studies such as Skocpol (1993).

⁵ By this differentiation next to institutional policy (I), three other categories of institutional change are generated, according to the criteria of “reflexivity of change” and “degree of change”: (II) If such deliberate attempts simply fail, “institutional inertia or stalemate” (low degree of change) is brought about. (III) If change can be observed but is not driven forward by reflexive considerations it can be spoken of “incremental adoption”. (IV) Finally, we have cases of “institutional stability”, when there are neither attempts to intentionally redesign institutions nor emergent dynamics at work; in this case, simply nothing happens.

But before slicing the process of coordination in different stages, we need to clarify the institutional context in which coordination takes place. Thus we commit ourselves to the traditions of institutional theory (cf. Hall/Taylor 1996) which assume that “institutions matter” and that the specific historical, constitutional and institutional setting of a country sets up the conditions under which central governments work, thereby framing the broad manner in which coordination proceeds. Thus, we expect to see that country-specific coordination patterns are produced because a nation’s institutional context “filters” the way coordination is applied.⁶ We define the specific institutional features of a polity relevant for coordination as follows: the constitutional provisions for central government; the political rules of the game, referring to the basic political constellations such as coalition vs. one-party government; and, on a micro-level, the typical features of ministerial organisation and behaviour.⁷ These features are related to coordination in differing yet interlinked ways, (for example, the features of ministerial organisation are commonly connected to the constitution), but for the sake of analytical simplification we do not specify this any further. Rather, we treat all of these features as the institutional context of central government coordination.

2.2.1 Coordination as a process

Coordination in central government is traditionally conceived of horizontally, taking place among ministries and between ministries and the Prime Minister’s Office or the Chancellery respectively. Studies of coordination are typically concerned with the question of “pulling against gravity?” (Bakvis 2002) which is particular to Westminster systems, or the problem of “departmentalism” (Kavanagh/Richards 2001, cf. also Scharpf 1973, Bourgault 1997, Davis 1997, Bakvis 2002, Bakvis/Juillet 2004). Ever since Pollitt (1984) discussed the creation of giant departments in the UK, departmental reshuffles and the proper size of ministerial organisation and implications on coordination have been investigated. For example, Crasswell and Davis (1994) studied the effects of amalgamating large departments in Australia. In a classic (horizontal) study of the German federal bureaucracy, Mayntz and Scharpf (1975) draw on an earlier (and well-known) distinction by Scharpf (1973, pp. 85) between positive and negative coordination among ministries. While in cases of positive coordination all

⁶ Davis (1997) provides a comprehensive account on how different state traditions influence coordination in central governments.

⁷ Furthermore, it is obvious that the functional division of competencies between different state levels could be relevant for governmental coordination. But as all the three countries under study are highly decentralized – Denmark and Sweden delegate most of service delivery and implementation to the local level and central government agencies and Germany, a federal country, allocates most of the implementation is allocated at the level of the states - we will not explicitly refer to this feature. Here, central government coordination is basically coordination of policy formulation.

relevant organisational units simultaneously join in dealing with a problem identified, in cases of negative coordination, the process of problem-solving is initiated and dominated by the organisational unit specialized in that policy domain (*ibid.*).

Taking into account the lessons from this literature, and in order to analyse coordination as a process, we first identify the allocation of ministerial portfolios as a preliminary to coordination, second, distinguish three stages of the coordination process and third, describe the techniques of coordination.

Ministerial portfolio allocation

Occasionally, ministerial portfolio reshuffling is considered as a technique of coordination, but we argue that it is rather a preliminary to coordination processes. Generally speaking, two arguments hold for analyzing portfolio allocation as a preliminary to central government coordination.

First, the allocation of ministerial portfolios makes a difference from a theoretical point of view. It is a well-known argument in organisational theory that single organisations not only develop self-interests, but also frame the cognitive and normative borders of the organisation's participants, resulting in "selective perception". Decision-making within an organisation is pre-structured by the cognitive and normative values prevalent within the organisation (cf. Simon 1997, pp. 287). Ministries receive their organisational borders via the allocation of the portfolio.

Second, the allocation of ministerial portfolios pre-structures options of conflict-solving. As Derlien points out (cf. 1996, p. 570), it depends upon the allocation of portfolios whether certain conflicts can be solved hierarchically (namely when such a conflict is internalized into one ministry and thus allows for a minister to take the final decision), or if such a conflict needs to be solved inter-ministerially. Therefore, ministerial portfolio allocation (and thus the reshuffling of those portfolios) tackles the prerequisites of the coordination process by being placed prior to single coordination processes.

Stages of coordination

We differentiate three stages of coordination: administrative, political-administrative and political stages of coordination. In doing so, we address the politics-administration dichotomy in central government. Considering Bakvis points out that “what is useful to note is interaction at the top and interaction at lower levels should be conceptualized as distinct phenomenon with different consequences” (Bakvis 2002, p.3),⁸ it seems reasonable to distinguish between coordination either pursued by politicians or civil servants. This distinction corresponds to differing rationalities influencing political and administrative behaviour (cf. Döhler 2001, p. 15, Mayntz 1984, pp.194).

The rationality of political behaviour is influenced by factors such as party politics in coalition government, both in terms of material policy goals (which coalition party has which policy goal in each policy domain?) and in terms of positions in government (where are the different government parties represented in central government coordination?). Re-election incentives for ministers also play an important role.

The rationality of administrative behaviour is characterized by the professional orientation of civil servants, by their role as experts in specific policy domains, by departmental traditions within that policy domain, and by incentives for advancing individual careers. When it comes to conflict-solving, politicians seek for a political solution, whereas civil servants are more interested in developing a policy solution (cf. Döhler 2001, p. 15). These differing rationalities are supposed to derive from the specific incentive structures to which politicians and bureaucrats respond respectively.

Those two differing rationalities represent the two ends of coordination processes, but as the dichotomy of politics and administration is rather blurred in central government, it seems reasonable to distinguish an in-between stage of coordination: administrative-political coordination. Thus, we distinguish three stages of coordination as follows:

First, administrative coordination, referring to all coordination activities pursued by rank-and-file civil servants in the beginning stage of the coordination process and driven by the specific rationalities as laid down above.

⁸ Bakvis here refers to Glyn Davis suggesting to distinguish between political, policy and administrative coordination according to the tasks coordinated (Davis 1997, p. 133).

Second, the administrative-political stage, which refers to the stage in the coordination process when the predominantly administrative stage is at its end, and policy proposals have not yet been forwarded to the mere political stage. It is here that it can be assumed that political considerations gain importance, and in terms of actors it is mainly top civil servants, such as state secretaries, that are now involved. These top civil servants are assumed to be more politically oriented than civil servants further down the hierarchy, but not as much as ministers. Thus, this stage comes across as a juncture between administrative and political coordination.

Third, the political stage of coordination, which sees the involvement of ministers and heads of government. This is the final stage of coordination and is mainly oriented according to the specific political rationality. It goes without saying that these distinctions serve for analytical purposes only and that in 'the real world' the borders are sometimes blurred.

2.2.2 Techniques of coordination

How coordination as a process is actually pursued within central government is basically a question of the techniques used. For example, these techniques have been discussed with a focus on cabinet (cf. Blondel/Müller-Rommel 1998), cabinet committees or inter-ministerial working groups (Siedentopf 1976, Mackie/Hogwood 1985, Knudsen 2000).

These techniques relate to the measures undertaken in order to coordinate (produce coherent government policies) within central government. We distinguish two basic types of techniques for coordination: (a) structural or (b) procedural techniques.

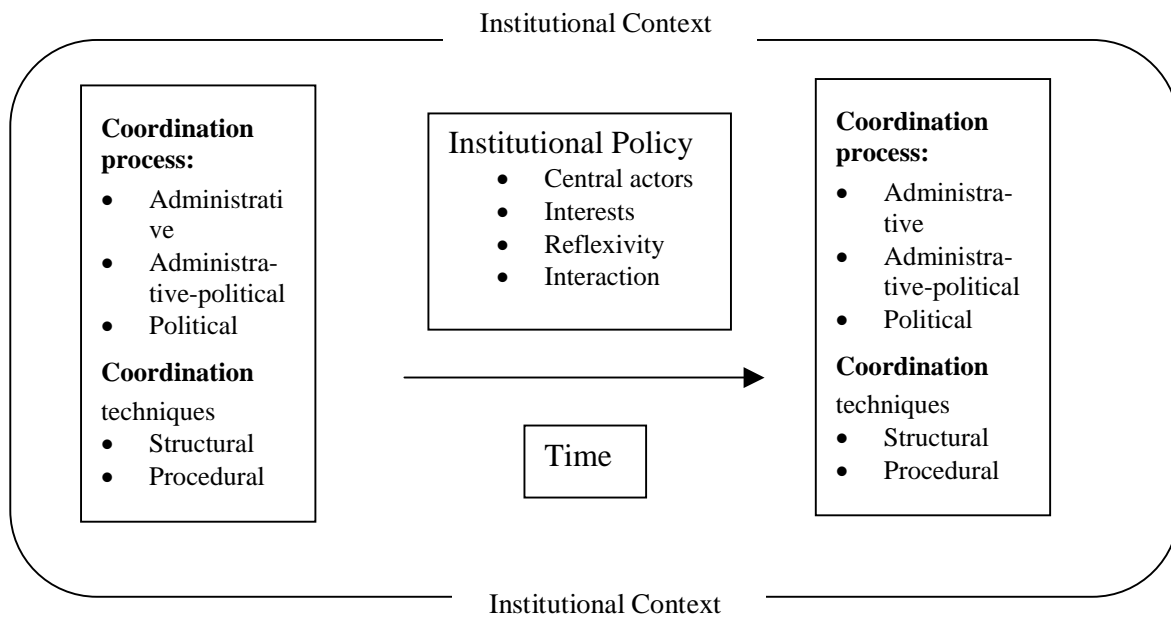
(a) Structural coordination techniques refer to organisational structures that are established in central government in order to generate coherent government policies. The relevant actors meet under the headings of these organisational structures. Conflicts between different government organisations are to be solved here, contradictions are to be eliminated and decisions on policy proposals, bills, etc. are to be made. These structural coordination techniques are supposed to be relatively stable with well-defined ways of decision-making, and are thus held to be the most apparent and institutionalized techniques of coordination. Bodies practising these techniques include cabinet as the highest (in terms of internal governmental hierarchy) organisational structure, cabinet committees and inter-ministerial working groups on a civil service level.

(b) Procedural coordination techniques structure the ways and means established in central government in order to create coherent government policies. Information about policy proposals (and so on) of other government organisations is ordered by these procedural techniques, which therefore represent the way this information is provided for the other organisational units within government. By the same token they not only inform but allow actors to signal agreement and likewise disagreement on the proposal or bill, including (for example) the co-signing procedure commonly established among German ministries.

The sum of the techniques used form a specific pattern of coordination within central government. Both procedural and structural techniques of coordination can be used at the same time, and they can also overlap with each other materially, so that, for example, procedural coordination techniques such as the German Joint Rules of Procedure for Federal Ministries might specify structural coordination techniques. Thus, this distinction mainly serves for analytical purposes.

2.3 Analytical framework: Changing coordination in central government

Investigating changing coordination from an institutional policy perspective basically means identifying activities directed towards coordination as object of institutional politics within central government. Combining our two approaches as laid down above thus requires us to firstly identify the basic features of the institutional context as already pointed out, secondly to identify the stages of the coordination process and thirdly to identify the use of coordination techniques over time. When looking at what actually changed over time we must also question the logic which has driven this change forward (institutional policy). Thus, central actors, their interests and the question of reflexivity have to be considered (the institutional policy perspective). This analytical framework, provided in order to structure our empirical analysis for changing coordination in Germany, Denmark and Sweden can be summarized as follows in Figure 1.



3. Country Study: Denmark

3.1 Institutional Context

The Danish constitution does not provide many regulations on central government, and nor do those few prescribe in detail the structure, organisation and procedures in central government. Two constitutional rules are important. First, the primary constitutionally defined tasks of the prime minister (the head of government) are the appointment and dismissal of ministers as well as tailoring the departmental portfolios and distributing those among the ministers (§ 14). Second, the principle of ministerial responsibility also derives from the constitution (§13). Every minister is solely and personally accountable for any activities within his department towards parliament, and it derives from here that he/she is the political and administrative superior for his/her ministry, equivalent to Germany's departmental principle (*Ressortprinzip*). Parliament is constitutionally entitled to hold single ministers and/or the prime minister accountable by a motion of no confidence (§15).⁹ It further derives from the departmental principle that neither the prime minister nor the cabinet collectively can (formally) instruct single ministers on special issues; thus every minister enjoys a high degree of autonomy. The only governmental institution recognized by the constitution is the *Ståtsrådet*¹⁰ (§17) which nowadays mainly serves merely as a formal and ritual institution (Olsen 1999, p. 76, Knudsen 2000a, p. 157), having been replaced by cabinet (Olsen 1999, p. 86, cf. below). In terms of procedures the constitution remains silent.

The principle of ministerial responsibility - commonly considered as *the* basic principle according to which Danish central government works - places the minister as the political and administrative chief of each ministry (Christensen/Christiansen/Ibsen 1999, p. 35). This has several consequences. First, ministries are clearly hierarchical institutions.¹¹ Second, Danish ministers are considered the single "political element" (Christensen 1999, p. 185) within every ministry: the Danish civil service is clearly a merit bureaucracy (cf. Christensen 2004);

⁹ Since 1945 these have only been adopted twice, but Damgaard describes them as important due to their "omnipresent possibility , and (...) the rule of 'anticipated reaction'" (2004, p. 118).

¹⁰ *Ståtsrådet* consists of the prime minister and all departmental ministers and is presided by the monarch. It is here, the queen signs all laws and is informed about all governmental activities.

¹¹ A usual ministry is organized as follows: Headed by the minister with a private office, followed by a permanent secretary, being the top-civil servant within the single organization, further followed by several divisions, that consist of smaller sections, being the central working units, which are headed by heads of sections, in which special and executive advisors work, right above the ordinary civil servant (*fuldmægtig*), being the lowest level of (academic) bureaucracy occupied with policy formulation.

political appointees such as e.g. in Germany are fairly unknown.¹² Third, positions within the overall senior executive service¹³ are mainly recruited from within the ministry,¹⁴ as figures for the 1990s show (Bet. 1354, 1998, p. 47). Civil servants seeking promotion find themselves in a structure that offers clear incentives for them to direct all their attention to serve their own minister alone. Involvement in inter-ministerial activities seems clearly not to be rewarded within the system.

In terms of political constellations, Denmark “holds the world record for the incidence of minority governments in parliamentary democracies since 1945” (Damgaard 2004, p. 116). Since the early 1970s, no majority governments held office except for a short period 1993/94 in the first Paul Nyrup Rasmussen government. Beyond holding the minority in parliament, Danish governments are traditionally coalition governments composed by at least two parties: since the early 1980s no single-party government has been in power (cf. Damgaard 2000).

To sum up, the institutional context of Danish central government coordination first leaves large room for institutional development, since the relative absence of constitutionally defined rules; second, however, the departmental principle combined with the traditional career system ensures that ministerial organisations will direct their attention wholly towards “their” minister; and third, the tradition for minority coalition governments will call for counterbalancing efforts.

3.2 The Coordination process in Danish central government

3.2.1 Ministerial Portfolio Allocation

The original portfolio structure in Danish central government was prescribed with the introduction of the ministerial system in 1848, but since then several reshuffles have been undertaken, as most clearly discussed by Hanne Foss Hansen (1999, pp. 94; for an overview of departmental reshuffles until the late 1970s cf. Christensen 1980, ch. 2). Hansen argues that the development of departmental structures from 7 in 1848 to 20 in 1998 not only displays the growth of the tasks the Danish state is carrying out, but can also be considered a process of

¹² However, there has been an ongoing debate on the political advice from civil servants and particularly on the question whether such political positions should be installed (cf. Bet. 1354, 1998, Bet. 1443, 2004).

¹³ SES is here defined in terms of their payment scheme, from pay frames 35-42 (cf. Jensen 2001).

¹⁴ Even though single ministry careers of permanent secretaries have been in decline since the 1970ies (Jensen 2001, p. 84), in 1999 still 60% of permanent secretaries have been recruited for the top-position from within the ministry (Christensen 2004, p. 20).

functional differentiation, specialization, and professionalisation and also as a technique for the organisational setting of political preferences (ibid., p. 97). This could be observed, for example, when the former Ministry of Energy was amalgamated with the Ministry of Environment in 1993 under a social-democratic-led government focusing on the environmental effects of energy policy (Bogason 2003, p. 40).

More recently, in 1996, the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fishery was created by changing the name of the former Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery and also shifting all policy making responsibilities in the area of food safety to the newly established ministry. This reshuffle has been interpreted as a political upgrading of consumer interests within central government (cf. Larsen 2002). By and large, Denmark has had about 20 ministries since end of the Second World War: several reshuffles took place but the number remained stable. As one observer puts it, there is a clear and increasing tendency for prime ministers to use their powers to reshuffle departmental portfolios in order to organisationally prioritise political preferences (Interview Ministry of Finance). This could be seen in August 2004 and directly after the last election early in 2005.

Several attempts¹⁵ have been undertaken to classify the range of Danish ministries according to their main task (cf. Jensen 1997, Christensen/Christiansen/Ibsen 1999, pp. 109). Although the results are ambiguous (cf. Bogason 2003, pp. 42), “ministries with coordinating tasks” are distinguished and mainly the PMO, and the Ministries of Finance and Justice (Knudsen 1995, pp.327, Jensen 1997, p.54) can for the purpose of this paper be subsumed here.¹⁶ For those, however, larger departmental reshuffles tackling their coordinating tasks have not been undertaken during recent years.

To sum up, first, departmental reshuffles are obviously used by Danish prime ministers in order to pre-determine political processes. Furthermore, the clustering of Danish ministries indicates that some actors (PMO, Finance and Justice) are supposed to be more involved in coordination than others, and it can thus be assumed that they might develop strategic preferences towards coordination.

¹⁵ For example, Danish ministries are clustered in four groups according to the nature of their main tasks, so a distinction is often made between coordinating ministries, general regulating ministries, specific regulating ministries being in charge of special societal groups or sectors, such as e.g. Fishery and service delivery ministries (c.f Christensen/Christiansen/Ibsen 1999, pp. 109, for a critical discussion of this analytical clustering, cf. Bogason 2003, pp. 42).

¹⁶ Occasionally the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economics and Environment are also labelled coordinating ministries.

3.2.2 Administrative Stage

Generally, the governmental (coalitional) program (*lovprogram*) sets out the guidelines stipulating which bills should be pursued throughout the parliamentary year. Two basic organisational forms of how bills proceed can be distinguished (cf. Justitsministeriet 2005, pp. 54): solely within single ministries or by establishing special committees (*lovforberede udvalg*), in which interest organisations are included in the preparation of policy proposals.¹⁷ But, as a recent study shows, the use of the latter has been decreasing since 1975 (Christiansen/Nørgaard 2003, ch. 5, cf. Nielsen 1999, p.183).¹⁸ Thus, basically bills are prepared within single departments, mainly at section level (*kontor*) or as Knudsen puts it, “most legislation comes from the ‘bottom-up’” (Knudsen 2000a, p.160). Scharpf concludes, therefore, that the typical policy formulation process is dominated by negative coordination.

The overall impression one gains of Danish central government is that it lacks formal procedures. It is generally argued that the government has informal substitutes for procedural coordination techniques (cf. Knudsen 2000a), mainly through informal inter-organisational networks between civil servants (Knudsen 1995, p. 335) as part of the “island culture” prevalent on Slotsholmen (cf. Jensen 2001).

However, in 1998 the PMO published a decree that specifically refers to the involvement of other ministries when preparing bills (Circulære nr 159 af 16/09/1998, ch. 4), stating that bills should be forwarded “as soon as possible” (ibid. §§ 24, 25) to the Ministries of Justice (§ 24), Finance (§25) and PMO (§25).¹⁹

The Ministry of Justice’s special division called *Lovafdelingen* is responsible for a legal check-up on any bill’s compliance with other provisions in Danish and international law and with technical standards of law-making (cf. Jensen 2000). However, since *Lovafdelingen*, first, enjoys a good reputation in central government owing to the supposedly high standard of

¹⁷ Occasionally, civil servants from other ministries are included as well –but no systematic information on these cases is available (as far as we know).

¹⁸ The decreasing of such preparing committees is explained by reasons concerning the length of such committees’ work – it simply takes much longer than preparation of bills within the department (Nielsen 1999, p. 183) and e.g. in the case of the Ministry of Commerce that particularly sought more freedom to manoeuvre when preparing bills (cf. Christiansen/Nørgaard 2003, p. 99).

¹⁹ Such decrees were also released earlier, notably in 1995 (Circulære nr 12 af 11/01/1995) and 1993 (Circulære nr 167 af 01/10/1993), but whereas the 1995 version does not contain any provisions regarding the inclusion of other ministries, the 1993 version (abolished by the follow-up in 1995) states that any bill *expressis verbis* must be sent to the same ministries as mentioned above (§1).

professional-legal knowledge (Christensen 1980, p. 180, Nielsen 1999, p. 187, Jensen 2000, p.275) and since the legal check-up is considered a technical rather than a political task *per se* by the other ministries (Christensen 1980, p. 180), it can most likely be considered a purely formal matter, rather than as an opportunity to exercise an active veto power.

The special position assigned to the Ministry of Finance comes into play if the bill under preparation will produce “essential economic, administrative or personnel consequences” (CIR 159 af 16/09/1998, §25, stk. 2). In that case, the ministries are supposed to initiate negotiations with the Ministry of Finance “as soon as possible” (*ibid.*, own translation). This special position of the Ministry of Finance (compared to other ministries) formally derives from its central role in the budget process: every ministry has to agree its yearly budget with the Ministry of Finance.

As to the role of the PMO, the decree remains rather unspecific, so it most likely serves to provide information or warnings. In 1993, personal and organisational restructuring was introduced. The personnel became younger on average, the number of academic employees increased and a system of “borrowing” personnel from ministries has been established (Knudsen 2000c, pp. 93). And the formerly very loose organisational structure became more hierarchical: access to the Prime Minister was concentrated in the hands of the Permanent Secretary, the heads of division and the personal secretary of the Prime Minister. The overall aim was to “enhance the insights of the PMO into what happened in the ministries in order to reduce the risk that unpleasant, ready-made decisions were presented to cabinet” (Knudsen 2000c, p.95, own translation). According to Knudsen this renewal led to the increasing influence of the Prime Minister and the PMO within government (*ibid.*, p. 98), providing the background for the 1998-decree.

Thus, even though the provisions now formally stated seem somewhat unspecific, a forwards-and-back trend towards more formalisation of procedural coordination tasks can be stated and has obviously developed into a longer-lasting provision since the actual one has now been in force for seven years.

The special positions held by the PMO and the Ministries of Justice and Finance can be considered a procedural as well as a structural technique of coordination. Forwarding any bill for legal-check up is a clearly procedural requirement within the policy making process.

However, conceiving *Lovafdelingen* as a relevant actor with some (formal) kind of decision-making competency refers to structural coordination techniques by assigning a veto-position within central government coordination that can be assumed for the PMO, the Finance Ministry and the Justice Ministry.

Inter-ministerial working groups are also used as structural coordination techniques. Although information on these is rare, it is, however, common knowledge that they are used to resolve inter-ministerial conflicts (Schou 1997, p.205, Christensen 1980, pp. 158, Knudsen 1995, p. 303, Henrichsen 1999, p. 285) and therefore, as Christensen put it, “their relevance for inter-ministerial coordination must not be undervalued” (Christensen 1980, p. 158, own translation). Christensen argues that most coordination problems are solved on civil servants’ level in working groups or simply by *ad hoc* contacts (Christensen 1980, p. 158). Knudsen speaks of a “highly increased formalised cooperation in inter-ministerial committees” (Knudsen 1995, p. 303, own translation) counting “ca. 850” (*ibid.*) for the mid-1990s. Thus, it is difficult to assess the impact of inter-ministerial working groups on central government coordination (and especially the way this might have changed), but it seems reasonable to assume that contacts at the civil servant level between different ministries via working groups or via informal contacts (*cf.* above) do contribute to inter-ministerial conflict-solving.

3.2.3 Administrative-political stage

Two groups of permanent secretaries undertaking coordination in the administrative-political stage can be distinguished. The first group meets informally, but regularly, in so-called ‘lunch clubs’ and are furthermore connected together via informal, professionally based networks, also part of the already mentioned “island culture” (Jensen 2001, p.89).

Secondly, Lotte Jensen puts forward the case of a parallel group of permanent secretaries (*styregrupper*) who have prepared the meetings of the Committee on Economic Affairs since 1993. This group acts as a “gate-keeper” (Jensen 2003, p.217) for the cabinet committee as nothing is forwarded to the cabinet committee which has not been approved by the *styregrupper* (*ibid.*, p. 218). This construction was probably considered a success, since such a parallel group of permanent secretaries has also been established for preparing the meetings of the Coordination Committee (*cf.* below). All in all, coordination efforts in the administrative-political stage have probably gained in importance over time.

3.2.4 Political Stage

Cabinet committees have been established since the Second World War, but it was not until the late 1960s that cabinet committees were “established as a normal form of coordination” (Christensen 1985, p. 116). However, they have varied a great deal in number, membership and relevance; most notably, the Anker Jørgensen V government of 1981/82 set up 25 different cabinet committees (for an overview cf. Knudsen 2000b, p. 69 and p. 71). The current government (Fogh Rasmussen II) has established six different cabinet committees. It comes as no surprise that no formal rules for the establishment or competencies of cabinet committees exist.

The Committee on Economic Affairs (since 1960, except 1990-1993), and the Coordination Committee (since 1982) have developed over time as the two most important committees. Numbers of members and participating ministers vary (*ibid.*). Whereas the Committee on Economic Affairs has traditionally been headed by the Minister of Economics (until 1990), the Prime Minister has always led the Coordination Committee. The Coordination Committee has occasionally been labelled an “inner cabinet” (Wolf 1998, p. 37, Olsen 1999, p. 99, Knudsen 2000a, p. 161) because the party leaders (and high-ranking cabinet ministers) are traditionally members of the Coordination Committee.

The presiding ministry serves as the secretariat of each committee, providing agendas, sometimes writing minutes and sending out material in advance (Olsen 1999, pp. 97). This indicates that cabinet committees are not only regularly established political meetings but also that some slightly more formal procedures have been installed. The Committee on Economic Affairs is responsible for all economically relevant policies, whereas the Coordination Committee is occupied with all strategic matters and all “major affairs” (Wolf 1998, p. 38) (*cf.* below). Until the late 1970s the Committee on Economic Affairs was the central committee within Danish central government, but the Coordination Committee has taken over the central role since its establishment in 1982, which led to the temporary abolishment of the Committee of Economic Affairs between 1990 and 1993.

As most clearly argued by Lotte Jensen, the Committee on Economic Affairs was re-established in 1993 on the suggestion of the Minister of Finance, who since then has been the chairman. The idea was not only to establish a forum for the coordination of economic policy but also to launch a forum for the coordination of coalition politics, with three party leaders

(out of a four-party-coalition) acting as ministers at the same time (cf. Jensen 2003, p. 196). The other ministers participate when an issue concerning their portfolio is on the agenda.

This revitalised Committee for Economic Affairs became “the central arena” (Jensen 2003, p. 200) for government coordination during the 1990s. However, the Coordination Committee also existed during the 1990s, and Adam Wolf in 1998 described the division of labour between these two cabinet committees as follows: “Whereas the *Co-ordination Committee* was originally conceived as the overall co-ordinating body of the Cabinet, in recent years it has concentrated more and more on solving political conflicts among coalition partners leaving budget planning and economic policy issues to formal or informal bodies headed by the Minister for Finance” (Wolf 1998, p. 37). Generally, all matters of “political impact and potential conflict” (ibid.) are supposed to be tabled in the Coordination Committee. It is reported from both cabinet committees that bills are occasionally sent back to the ministries in order to sort out remaining conflicts that cannot be dealt with within one of the cabinet committees.

However, recently it can be observed that the Coordination Committee has regained relevance and that it is purposely used as a tool for the Prime Minister, as demonstrated by the establishment of a parallel committee on the permanent secretaries’ level. Both cabinet committees intensified their activities and increased their competencies over time and are by now central decision-makers and veto-players in central government coordination.

All in all, the cabinet committees on Danish coalition politics have a centripetal role. More generally, it can be argued that the cabinet committees have received a permanent status as structural techniques of coordination, that they have intensified their activities and increased their competencies and that some kind of formalization can be observed. Thus, it is not overstated to speak of an institutionalization of cabinet committees as structural techniques of central government coordination in Denmark.

The cabinet or the meeting of ministers (as directly translated from the Danish expression *ministermøde*) ordinarily meets Tuesday mornings, presided over by the Prime Minister.²⁰ No formal provisions apply. It was not until 1971 that a civil servant from the PMO has participated taking minutes and ever since 1982 the Permanent Secretary of the PMO has also

²⁰ Nowadays cabinet meetings take place less than 40 times a year, continuously declining since the 1930s, when frequency of cabinet meetings peaked, amounting to ca. 100 a year (Knudsen 2000b, p.67).

attended cabinet meetings (Knudsen 2000b, pp. 65). The cabinet itself does not have an own secretariat, unlike the British Cabinet Office (for example); the PMO sets the agenda for cabinet meetings (Knudsen 2000b, p. 67).

Typical issues on the agenda of cabinet meetings include any kind of parliamentary issues, such as policy proposals, bills, and other governmental decisions, such as the establishment of cabinet or other governmental committees. Votes are not taken (Knudsen 2000b, p. 67). Usually, all conflicts over bills or other proposals are solved before they are tabled in cabinet. It hardly ever happens that cabinet decides not to forward the bill under scrutiny to Parliament (Olsen 1999, p. 90). Decisions are made by consensus and it is a commonly established norm among ministers not to involve themselves in issues of other ministers' portfolios, thereby protecting their own portfolio from interference of other ministers (Christensen/Christiansen/Ibsen 1999, p.85).

Cabinet is considered as an ex-post- control that assures that coordination between ministries takes place and brings about bills or proposals from which all conflicts and controversial matters have been excised in advance (Olsen 1999, p. 94). All in all, the relevance of the cabinet as real forum for decision-making, and thus as a technique for structural coordination, has declined over time. However, it still "has the final say on several important government matters" and can yet be considered a veto-player in coordination (Knudsen 2000a, p. 159).

3.3 Pattern of central government coordination

The coordination process and the techniques used within the specific institutional context combine to produce the following particular pattern of coordination. In the administrative stage of coordination in Danish central government, negative coordination dominates. It is here that the strength of the departmental principal becomes visible, further enhanced by the incentive structures arising from the typical career patterns for top-civil servants, as laid down above. Informal contact patterns as part of the *Slotsholmen* culture confine the effects of negative coordination.

The administrative-political stage of coordination is illustrated by the way the committees of permanent secretaries prepare meetings of the two most relevant cabinet committees, performing a bottle-neck function for tabling issues in the cabinet committees and thus for entering the political stage of the coordination process.

As cabinet committees became institutionalized and thus central decision-making bodies in Danish central government, the cabinet itself lost relevance. Three arguments might help to explain this development. First, the relative absence of constitutional provisions (and other formal rules) prescribing governmental process paved the way for a flexible handling of the organisation of governmental affairs.

Second, single ministers face two-fold challenges: on the one hand, the departmental principle, supported by the single minister's accountability towards parliament, produces a strong incentive to assert their own point of view; but on the other hand, the Prime Minister's right to dismiss ministers and the tradition for decision by consensus provides a strong incentive for conflict-solving before tabling proposals in cabinet, resulting in shifting conflict-solving out of cabinet.

Third, the prevalence of coalition minority governments produces a strong need for counterbalancing efforts of conflict-solving, which might be easier to achieve in small, centralized structures such as cabinet committees, rather than in the larger cabinet.

Even though procedural techniques have become slightly more formalized, providing optional veto-players, coordination processes still seem to feature *ad hoc* informal contacts and networks. In sum, the structural techniques of coordination seem to be used more systematically by institutionalized decision-making bodies. All in all, procedural formalization and structural institutionalisation can be interpreted as attempts to establish regular processes that might have been functionally required.

More generally, the analysis of the Danish central government coordination process shows that the main part of inter-ministerial conflict-solving takes place in the administrative stage, or to a smaller extent in the administrative-political stage, where all major conflicts are supposed to be sorted out.

3.4 Changing coordination in Denmark from an institutional policy perspective

The Prime Minister's use of reshuffling departmental portfolios can clearly be interpreted as an attempt to organise political preferences and as such being a strategic choice by which the

policy process can be pre-structured. However, reshuffling departmental portfolios has not yet been used as a tool to strategically govern coordination in a narrow sense – for example, the portfolio allocations of the coordinating ministries have not been changed for some time.

The formalisation of procedural techniques of coordination can be considered simply as process of writing down regular praxis, as argued by Olsen (1999, p. 74), but this still leaves us with the question of which factors actually motivated this formalisation. Thus, on the other hand (as we argue here), it could more reasonably be interpreted as an attempt to react towards basic horizontal coordination problems, as when ministries simply did not comply towards informal rules and thus displayed dysfunctional impacts of informality. Surely, formalizing can be considered as an attempt to reduce uncertainty about how policy proposals are supposed to proceed within central government. The PMO released the decree formalizing coordination procedures (albeit on low level) and this could also be interpreted as an attempt by the PMO to get a tighter grip on the policy formulation process. This interpretation becomes more plausible when studying the changes of structural coordination at the same time as the Ministry of Finance brought itself “to the center of decision-making” (Jensen 2004, p. 39). It thus appears reasonable that the PMO tried to enhance its position by formalizing coordination procedures as a counter-balancing attempt.²¹ The strategy of the Ministry of Finance can clearly be interpreted as a self-reflexive effort by which the ministry had defined and pursued its own interests. As shown by Jensen, the Ministry of Finance intentionally designed the institutional structures of central government coordination according to its interests and succeeded in controlling the rules of interaction within central government during the mid-1990s by both ‘capturing’ the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs and the *styregrupper*. The institutionalization process of using cabinet committees as places for decision-making in Danish central government had started long before the Ministry of Finance got a grip on the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs. It could, however, be argued that the institutionalization process has been further enhanced by the “success” of the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs during the 1990s. The establishment of a preparation committee for the Coordination Committee could also be interpreted as an attempt of the PMO to further enhance its strategic position as a central player in government coordination in Denmark. And indeed, lately, the relevance of the Coordination Committee has increased once again. This argument is further supported by the PMO’s attempt to change its

²¹ Even though Lotte Jensen argues that the prime minister and the Minister of Finance at that time had a very close personal relationship, so that the Prime Minister – who was, in any case, more interested in foreign affairs – did not feel threatened by the Ministry of Finance holding a key position in domestic affairs (Jensen 2003).

organisational structure and transform itself into a more modern, strategic and policy-oriented organisation. To sum up, the main observable changes in central government coordination throughout the last years can be interpreted as an on-going struggle between the PMO and the Ministry of Finance to be a central player.

More generally, the changes in central government can not be interpreted as a coherent governmental programme for central government change, but rather as an actor-centred strategy, of how to change one's own position by amending the rules of interaction for central government coordination. This might be a consequence of the prevailing departmental principle in Danish central government. This logic of change could be labelled "fragmented institutional politics".

4. Country study: Germany

4.1 Institutional context

One of the main goals of the German post-war constitution was to build in mechanisms assuring stability, particularly cabinet stability. Executive power should be constitutionally safeguarded, which resulted in power concentrating on cabinet and the Chancellor. Article 65 in the German constitution (*Grundgesetz, GG*) disperses the executive power between the Chancellor (*Kanzlerprinzip*), the federal ministers (*Ressortprinzip*) and the cabinet (*Kollegialprinzip*). The Chancellor “shall determine, and be responsible, for the general policy guidelines” (*Richtlinienkompetenz*) (art. 65 GG), he is in charge of the appointment and dismissal of ministers (art. 64 GG), and of the allocation of the numbers and portfolios of ministries. However, the Ministries of Finance, Justice and Defence are constitutionally protected. Within these general policies, every minister conducts his ministry and policy domain independently, the so-called departmental principle (*Ressortprinzip*). Ministers are thus not subordinate to the Chancellor and he can not instruct them on single issues within their ministries’ affairs, but sets out the general policy guidelines.²² This departmental principle provides substantial autonomy to single ministers within their policy domains as well as in all questions of the management and organisation of his/her ministry, from which substantial autonomy for single ministries in relation to the other ministries in federal government derives. Furthermore, this includes the principle of ministerial responsibility. However, German ministers are not accountable to Parliament, but to the Chancellor. A so-called “constructive motion of no-confidence” by Parliament can only be put forward against the Chancellor and the cabinet collectively. The cabinet is supposed to decide collectively as a collegiate body (art. 65 GG). Procedural provisions also follow up the requirements of the constitution of the Weimar republic: art. 65 requires the Chancellor to “conduct the affairs of the Federal Government in accordance with rules of procedure adopted by it” (*ibid.*, cf. below), but more detailed provisions for procedure are not required constitutionally. This focus on rule-based decision-making represents the essential idea of the *Rechtsstaat* (Sturm/Müller 2003, p. 193). From a constitutional perspective, the Chancellor holds quite a strong position,²³ but both in theory and practice the three governmental principles are balanced and interlocked by each other.

²² As Saalfeld indicates “whether an issue falls under a departmental minister’s competencies or the Chancellor’s right to determine the government’s overall policy is sometimes ambiguous” (Saalfeld 2003a, p.51).

²³ Particularly when compared to the constitution of the Weimar republic.

Since single ministers possess substantial autonomy, German ministries are clearly hierarchical line organisations,²⁴ with the politically appointed state secretary as the top civil servant directly beneath the minister. “Political civil servants” (mainly state secretaries and heads of divisions) can be dismissed “at any time and without any given reason”, according to a Federal Civil Service Law (§ 36 federal Civil Service Law). The option of exchanging political civil servants becomes of course most relevant when a minister or - even more obviously - government changes. This option has been increasingly used: when the red-green coalition took office in 1998, 57% of all political civil servants were exchanged, compared to 29% in 1969 when Willy Brandt was elected the first social-democratic Chancellor in post-war Germany (Schröter 2004, p. 72). Even though newly appointed top civil servants have since the 1960s increasingly been recruited from the *Länder* administrations (cf. Manow 2005), the typical civil service career is still confined to one ministry (cf. Döhler 2001, p. 19, Schröter 2004, p. 62). Overall, the departmental principle and the typical career pattern set incentives for single bureaucrats to focus attention on his/her “own” minister.

In Germany, (majority) coalition governments on federal level have been “the typical form of government” (Schmidt 1996, p. 72 as cited by Saalfeld 2003a, p. 32). Since 1949, there have been only four single-party governments out of 25 in all (Saalfeld 2003a, p. 49). Two-party coalitions dominate, either headed by a christian- or social-democratic chancellor.

To sum up, the institutional context of federal government coordination in Germany establishes a strong Chancellor and a collegially deciding cabinet, which encourages centripetal coordination. However, by the same token, this creates strong ministerial organisations fully focused on their own minister and organisation, from which a centrifugal effect on coordination arises, further enhanced by different parties’ interests in coalitional governments.

²⁴ The smallest organizational unit is the section (*Referat*), followed up by a sub-division (*Unterabteilung*). Several subdivisions constitute a division (*Abteilung*), led by a head of divisions. The section is the basic organizational unit, where most of the actual ministerial work, such as drafting bills, developing broader policies and so on, is performed. Usually, several divisions are supervised by one state secretary.

4.2 The coordination process in German federal government

4.2.1 Ministerial portfolio allocation

Since the 1970s the number of ministries in German federal government has remained relatively stable at around 16 (cf. Derlien 1996). In the Schröder government the number of ministries was reduced to 13 (excluding the Chancellery), among the lowest numbers since 1949 (Busse 2003, p. 408). As mentioned earlier, the Ministries of Finance, Justice and Defence are constitutionally protected, and thus have always remained present. However, several larger reshuffles have taken place, out of which the establishment of the Ministry of Environment in 1986, deserves mentioning, as well as, lately, the launch of the Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture. The deconstruction of the Ministry of Labour and Social Order right after the last election in 2002 added the responsibilities for labour market to the Ministry of Economics, resulting in the comparatively large Ministry of Economics and Labour, and attaching social security to the Ministry of Health and Social Security.

Whereas the establishment of the Ministry of Environment that was cut-off the Ministry of the Interior can be considered as a result of a process of differentiation of tasks, during which environmental tasks developed towards a policy domain of its own, in accordance with similar developments in other Western European countries, the other two mentioned reshuffles followed different logics.

The establishment of the Ministry of Consumer Protection emerged as a reaction towards the pending BSE crisis in 2001. It was mainly created out of the former Ministry of Agriculture and can be firstly interpreted as a political signal of prioritising consumer's interests, and secondly as an attempt to break up the traditional intermingling of the Ministry of Agriculture and the organized agricultural interests. This was supported by appointing a new minister, educated as a lawyer, for an office traditionally been held by an educated farmer.

At first sight, the latest creation of the Ministry of Economics and Labour also followed a (personnel) political logic: it seemed necessary to push-up the responsibilities of the Ministry of Economics in order to attract the then appointed minister. However, on second sight, a strategic political motivation can also be revealed: the former Ministry of Labour was reputedly closely linked with the traditional German labour unions. This traditional

connection was cut in order to prepare recent labour market reforms. Thus, the reshuffle (and the motivation for reshuffling) tackled potential inter-ministerial conflicts by incorporating them into the Ministry of Economics and Labour. This allowed the minister to take hierarchical decisions on labour market policies that would otherwise probably have broken up as conflicts in the inter-ministerial process between the two former ministries (BT-Drucksache 15/1411, p. 2, Busse 2003, p. 409). All in all, departmental reshuffles take place, but rather on an *ad hoc* basis, triggered by expedient political considerations than long-term organisational considerations.

4.2.2 Administrative Stage

As Mayntz and Scharpf point out in their path-breaking study on German federal bureaucracy, most of the policy initiatives arise from single ministries at section level (Mayntz/Scharpf 1975, pp. 63). Civil servants at section level (*Referenten*) not only take into account the “manageability” (ibid., p. 72) but also the “probable success” (ibid.) of an initiative. Since sections are relatively small, the scope of attention (and time) is reduced to their direct jurisdiction and its direct environment. Sections tend to avoid policy initiatives that are likely to be met by resistance, would not find support in cabinet or “which would lead to conflict with more powerful units in the same or other departments” (Mayntz/Scharpf 1975, p. 74). Thus, by anticipating options for success, civil servants take political considerations into account, resulting in “negative coordination”, and sections set up policy proposals, very much restricted to their own jurisdiction and very often without giving attention as to how other jurisdictions will be affected by their proposals (Mayntz/Scharpf 1975, p. 147). There are no indicators that this has changed since Mayntz and Scharpf published their study mentioned above in 1975.

In addition to informal contacts on a day-to-day basis (Manow 1996), formal requirements for horizontal coordination were established. The Joint Procedural Code of Federal Ministerial Departments (*Gemeinsame Geschäftsordnung der Bundesministerien, GGO*) provides some rules for horizontal coordination, two of which deserve mentioning. First, the concept of the “lead ministry” (*federführendes Ministerium*) according to which “prompt and comprehensive involvement is the responsibility of the lead Federal Ministry” (§19 sect. GGO, also § 45 sec. 1 GGO). The “nature of an issue” (Busse 2001, p. 99, own translation) decides which ministry

is the “leading” one for which issue.²⁵ The lead ministry drafts a proposal and sends it out to the affected ministries. Then, second, the rule of “co-signature” applies: the affected ministries are supposed to show agreement and disagreement respectively by “co-signing” any incoming draft. Usually within this process the lead ministry has to amend the original proposal, resulting in a reduction “of the scope of policy proposals and the effectiveness of problem solutions” (Mayntz/Scharpf 1975, p. 147). It is rendered more precisely in the GGO who is “affected” in which issues (section 3, § 45) and those responsibilities are further listed in Annex 8 of the GGO.²⁶ More specifically, the GGO prescribes that any bill has to be sent to the Ministries of Interior (§ 45 sec. 1 GGO) and Justice (§ 45 sec. 1 GGO, § 46 GGO)²⁷ for a legal-check up of its compliance with the constitution, any other legal regulations and formal legal standards.²⁸ As part of the regulatory impact assessment, the Ministry of Economics is to be consulted in order to give accounts of costs to industry for any new regulation (§ 44, sec. 4 GGO). Before submitting any bill to cabinet, the agreement of the Ministry of Finance (§ 51) needs to be obtained. The Chancellery has to become informed at an early stage about “all matters of fundamental political importance” (§24, sec. 1), which leaves some room for manoeuvre or interpretation as to the required point in time for information and to the definition of “fundamental political importance”.

The Chancellery today has about 500 employees, a number which has risen significantly since the late 1960s. These employees are mainly recruited from the other ministries for a couple of years (cf. Mertes 2000). The organisational structure resembles the ministerial portfolio structure, so that there is one section (*Spiegelreferat*) in the Chancellery responsible for every ministry, and which is supposed to maintain contact with each ministry and to oversee their activities. Judgments of the *Spiegelreferate*’s capacity to severely assess the ministries’ affairs vary (for a positive interpretation cf. Müller-Rommel 2000, pp. 89). It is difficult to assess the

²⁵ In case of doubts the ministries concerned are supposed to agree upon one, and only when sharp conflicts arise, the Chancellor or cabinet get involved (§ 9 GOBReg).

²⁶ This list of ministries resembles a somewhat superficial enumeration of all ministries according to the responsibilities actually arising from their name, rather than a detailed regulation on single issues. So it is for example stated that “the Federal Ministry of Health is to be involved, if health policy matters are affected” (Annex 8 GGO).

²⁷ This double responsibility assumed by two ministries mirrors a historic and not yet solved conflict over competencies among the two so-called constitutional ministries of Interior and Justice as e.g. described by Sperl (2001, pp. 57).

²⁸ Furthermore, attachment 8 of the GGO allows check-up competences to the Ministries of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Att. 8, sec. 9a), the Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (att. 8, sec. 12) and to the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (att. 8, sec. 14) in case their responsibilities are tackled. However, the competencies of the Ministries of Interior and Justice are laid down in explicitly within the text of the GGO and can be considered more relevant for coordination – particularly since they apply to any draft.

role of the Chancellery in federal government coordination: there are well-founded doubts of its capacities on the one hand, but on the other hand there are clear examples of cases when the Chancellery took over the responsibility for a certain program from the actual lead ministry (as has been reported for the recent program development of subsidising so-called elite-universities).

The Chancellery and the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Finance and Economics are the players that are to be involved in any case according to the GGO and thereby hold veto-positions. These positions are anticipated and taken into consideration by other ministries sending out policy proposals. Therefore, in terms of our analytical framework, the perspective changes: the GGO as such can be considered a procedural technique of coordination, whereas the position hold by the three players mentioned above contain elements of structural coordination – as has been argued for in the Danish case.

The GGO has been completely revised in 2000, now including all the provisions referred to above (cf. Zypries/Peters 2001, cf. Sperl 2001). The old version was developed in the late 1950s, but was based upon and somewhat similar to the earliest version dating back to 1926 (cf. Zypries/Peters 2001, p. 317). Before looking at the material changes, the process under which the GGO has been renewed is worth mentioning (for a detailed account, cf. Sperl 2001). After cabinet had made the decision, the lead ministry, which was the section for organisational issues in the Ministry of Interior, invited all other ministries to participate in an inter-ministerial working-group even before drafting the first ideas. This can be considered rather unusual, representing a case of positive coordination (cf. Sperl 2001, pp. 49). This inter-ministerial working group actually elaborated, discussed and decided most of amendments and the whole process took about two years.

The revision of the GGO was first and foremost aimed at modernising and slimming down the older version; however, the number of actual regulations has been reduced (even though there are several attachments in the revised version, which raise doubts about whether such a reduction is real) (Zypries/Peters 2001, p. 319). But more important for the purpose of this paper is the fact that the requirements for early involvement of other ministries were strengthened by now including every ministry and its responsibilities in the already mentioned attachment 8 (cf. Döhler 2001, p.24).²⁹ The GGO however, is not referred to in everyday

²⁹ In the former versions only ten and respectively eleven ministries for involvement were listed.

work, but mainly affects ministerial standard operating procedures indirectly. For example, if a ministry gets the impression that another one infringed the GGO rules, it would accuse its counterpart with direct reference to the GGO (cf. Sperl 2001, p. 37). So, it remains unclear whether the revision of the GGO has become visible in ministerial behaviour, and there is not yet an empirical account on this question. To sum up, even though the rules laid down in the GGO do not prescribe in detail the process of policy-formulation in federal government, it can be considered a procedural technique of coordination as it frames the background of actual proceedings in the administrative stage of federal government coordination.

However, the standard operating repertoire in German federal government also sets up inter-ministerial working groups (on civil service level) in order to either jointly prepare drafts, or to solve inter-ministerial conflicts. These working groups always refer to specialized topics. Inter-ministerial committees are mainly established on an *ad hoc* basis (even though some seem to be permanent) and appear on different echelons of ministerial hierarchy (cf. Lepper 1976). Very similar to the case of Denmark (cf. above), it has been argued on several occasions that inter-ministerial committees on civil service level are frequently set up (Mayntz/Scharpf 1975, p. 147, Döhler 2001, p. 23, Sperl 2001, p.33, Saalfeld 2003b, p.366). Academic information on such inter-ministerial working groups is, however, rare. The most comprehensive account dates back to 1968 (cf. Prior 1968), and the latest available survey (from 1976) counted 180 inter-ministerial committees (Lepper 1976, p. 435).³⁰

3.2.4 Administrative- political stage

Two different categories of coordination in the administrative-political stage can be distinguished. First, there is the meeting of all state secretaries, which regularly takes place two days before cabinet meets in order to prepare those cabinet meetings. Here, all items on the agenda for cabinet are discussed in order to clarify remaining conflicts or to identify which conflicts are not yet solved. It is particularly the Head of the Chancellery's responsibility to get actively involved in conflict-solving (cf. Busse 2005, p. 89). This regular group of state secretaries can formally decide to establish other groups or committees of state

30 However, the so-called "year-2000-taskforce" might serve as an example. It was established in November 1998 in order to coordinate government activities to prevent the famous (and never realized) IT crash in New Year 2000. It was allotted to the Ministry of Economics, but civil servants from other ministries, including foreign affairs and the Chancellery joined in, and they met regularly on a four-weeks basis (Bundesregierung 1999, p. 66). All in all, the use of inter-ministerial-committees can be considered a truly structural technique of coordination in German federal government, not regulated by any formal rules.

secretaries that can be subsumed under the second category.³¹ Basically, no formal rules apply (ibid., p. 92).

Thus, second, there are groups of state secretaries working on distinct issues, such as, for example, one on sustainable development (also called the “green cabinet”), which was established in 2001. This group brought together 11 state secretaries including the Chancellery and aimed to “transport the idea of sustainability home to their ministries and to develop cross-departmental policies and strategies for sustainability.”³² Here it seems plausible to conclude that this group does not get involved in inter-ministerial coordination, but rather resembles a (symbolic) political signal or priority respectively.

The Committee of state secretaries working on EU matters, in which the Ministries for Foreign Affairs, Economics, Agriculture, Finance and the Chancellery are represented, “deals with unresolved problems passed on from below; in general the more political as opposed to technical aspects have been filtered out at the lower level and (are) dealt with at the Sts (state secretaries, TH) level since 1963” (Derlien 2000, p. 60). On the one hand this signals that this committee makes decisions in horizontal coordination. On the other hand it mirrors the usual way of shifting issues upwards through the layers of hierarchy as is typical in German federal government: what can not be agreed upon on one level will be forwarded upwards to the next one (cf. Müller 2001, p. 19). However, there are several other committees,³³ but systematic information is rare.

Thus, it is difficult to finally assess the impact of those committees or working groups of state secretaries on horizontal coordination. They seem to be established for different purposes and due to a lack of systematic information it is unclear whether any change occurred in that respect.

Finally, it can be concluded that the regular meeting of state secretaries preparing cabinet meeting is probably the place where coordination in the administrative-political stage takes place.

³¹ It is also up to cabinet to formally establish new committees of state secretaries, but the state secretaries are also free to informally decide about launching a new group.

³²http://www.bmu.de/nachhaltige_entwicklung/nachhaltige_entwicklung/allgemeine_informationen/doc/2392.ph, 26.07.2005, own translation).

³³ There are also committees on the level of state secretaries that include external participants from organized interests or industry, as there is for example a Committee on emissions trading.

4.2.4 Political stage

Among observers there is widespread agreement that cabinet committees in Germany do not have a serious decision-making function in German federal government (Saalfeld 2003b, p. 366, Müller-Rommel 1994, p. 155), as has been documented for Denmark (cf. above). Cabinet committees, however, have always been set up. Lepper, for example, counted 12 for the mid-1970s (Lepper 1976, p. 436), and the current government has established five cabinet committees (Busse 2005, p. 91). Special coalition bodies seem more important for conflict-solving (cf. Saalfeld 2003b, p. 366): most of the coalition governments set up special bodies seeking agreement in conflicting issues (cf. Saalfeld 2003 a, pp. 60), in which both coalition parties (mostly involving both cabinet members and members of parliament) were represented. According to Saalfeld, “the overall direction of policy, important policy decisions, and questions of coalition governance are dealt with [by these bodies]...” (2003b, p. 366). These committees are truly informal and meet in case of need rather than on a regular basis, but they seem to have gained importance particularly in the Kohl governments (1982-1998). The subsequent Schröder government initially tried to proceed without such bodies (cf. Kropp 2003), but returned to this system shortly afterwards. This was because on the one hand severe coalitional conflicts had become public, and on the other hand “because the formal interministerial coordination bodies turned out to be ineffective” (Saalfeld 2003b, p. 367). To sum up, coalition bodies seem to serve as structural coordination techniques in the political stage of coordination. That could come as a surprise since they are highly informal, a fact that seems unusual for rule-based Germany.

Before clarifying the role of cabinet in political coordination, some rules deserve mentioning that are formally laid down in the rules of procedure of federal government (Geschäftsordnung der Bunderegierung, GOBReg)³⁴ as required by the constitution (Art. 65 sec.3, cf. above). As well as specifying basic constitutional rules more exactly, (ch. 1-3 GOBReg) this document also prescribes which matters are to be dealt with in cabinet, and contains all drafts for laws and ordinances, promotion of civil servants, all matters of relevance for the relationship to Parliament, and all not-yet solved inter-ministerial conflicts (§ 15 GOBReg). Furthermore, several ministers hold special positions in cabinet that are

34 The GOBReg regulates the relationship among the ministers and the Chancellor, whereas in the GGO the basic rules for the cooperation among ministries (and between ministries and other institutions such as e.g. Parliament) is laid down.

prescribed here, namely the Ministers of Finance, Interior and Justice (§ 26 GOBReg), for the same arguments as in the GGO (cf. above). The Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (§ 15a sec. 1 + 2 GOBReg) and, since the latest amendment in 2002, the Minister of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture (§ 15a sec.3 GOBReg) are permitted to set items on government agenda, even if those relate to another ministries' responsibilities. These special positions receive their power by creating anticipation: all of them are hardly used, but simply the possibility that those competencies might be realized triggers the process of policy preparation before drafts are presented to cabinet (cf. Busse 2005, p. 82). The functional interdependence between the administrative and political sequences of coordination becomes more visible here. It is up to the Chancellor to initiate discussions with two (or more) conflicting ministers (§17 GOBReg) if they were not able to solve the conflict matter on their own. A recent public example of the Chancellor mediating a conflict between two ministers is on the emissions trading as a part of climate protection policies. The ministers of environment and economics could not find an agreement here, and thus the Chancellor called them to the Chancellery for discussion, resulting in a joint position (cf. Der Tagesspiegel, 13.02.2004). As this is the very last instance of conflict-solving, it does not take place often.

According to a widespread view in Germany, the cabinet "has not developed into a collective decision-making body that is in effective control of government policy" (Mayntz/ Scharpf 1975, p. 42, Müller-Rommel 1997, pp. 189, Saalfeld 2003a, p. 60). However, it is the most high-ranking body in the German executive with decision-making competencies. It usually meets Wednesday mornings, and as well as the Chancellor and all ministers, other participants include the head of the Chancellery, the chief of the Federal Press Office, the Chancellor's personal secretary, the head of the presidents office and a civil servant taking minutes (cf. Busse 2005, p. 77). Occasionally, civil servants are invited to take part. The cabinet agenda is prepared by the Chancellery, which generally provides all secretariat functions to cabinet, even though it never developed into a Cabinet Office in the British sense. Cabinet usually decides consensually; real discussions or even controversies are rare (Busse 2005, p. 80), because usually all matters of conflict have been settled before. More generally, all ministers have "a vested interest in not interfering with, or in no criticizing, the proposals of fellow ministers" (Müller-Rommel 1997, p.191) in order to avoid criticism directed towards their own issues. A variety of literature exists elaborating on different styles of Chancellors heading government. These, however, seem to diverge, but more general changes in cabinet decision-making are not documented (cf. e.g. Müller-Rommel 1997).

All in all, the cabinet is rather a “final political check on the general lines of governmental policy” (Müller-Rommel 1997, p. 191) than a decision-making body involved in horizontal coordination in German federal government. Therefore, “the cabinet should be understood primarily as an assembly of heads of departments which must formally ratify important policy proposals originating from the departments” (Mayntz/Scharpf 1975, p. 43).

4.3 The pattern of coordination

The overall patterns of coordination in German federal government can be summed up as a combined use of procedural and structural coordination techniques as follows. It is due to the strength of the departmental principle that negative coordination prevails in the administrative stage of German federal coordination, but this effectiveness of the departmental principle is further enhanced by the typical rationalities of civil servants behaviour and their career incentives. Policy orientation, enhanced by the predominant professional values in the respective policy domain, results in policy proposals mainly set up from the ministry’s own point of view. Becoming visible for the state secretaries (or even the minister) in one’s “own” organisation is an important feature in order to promote one’s career.

The effects of negative coordination are alleviated both procedurally, by the GGO providing an anticipative framework defining possible veto-players, and structurally, by inter-ministerial committees. The fact that formal rules are prescribed can be ascribed the prevalent *Rechtsstaat* tradition.

In the administrative-political stage of coordination the regular meeting of all state secretaries preparing cabinet can be considered a bottle-neck in the coordination process. But as to its effectiveness, one could argue that they are hardly able to discuss all conflicts in detail, mainly due to a lack of time. However, since state secretaries are politically appointed by their own ministers, political considerations gain in importance. In addition, they are pressurized to solve conflicts in order to avoid conflicts for (and with) their ministers - this might also be assessed as their failure. More generally, these meetings can therefore be considered a counterbalancing structural technique to the effects of departmental egoism on a higher level of hierarchy, where pressure for conflict-solving is substantially greater than in the administrative stage.

In the stage of political coordination, both the constitutionally strong Chancellor and the demand for cabinet to decide collectively in addition to the departmental principle emerge on the scene.

Ministers on the one hand hold a strong interest in pursuing the interests of their own ministries in cabinet because of the departmental principle. On the other hand, owing to a strong Chancellor and the constitutional demand to decide as a collegium, they have strong incentives to make sure that all conflicts are resolved before an issue is tabled in cabinet. These contradictory challenges for single ministers allow for the following interpretation of the political stage of coordination in German federal government: in order to both avoid the Chancellor exercising his final prerogative in conflict-solving and to avoid controversy in cabinet, those conflicts are ‘out-sourced’ to the informal coalition bodies, where a solution acceptable in terms of the coalitional arithmetic can be found, even though the ordinary coordination process has failed. Finally, this results in a cabinet that is not the most important body for decision-making.

More generally, it is obvious that coordination is mainly horizontal-self coordination in which political considerations are somehow incorporated but become much more feasible as the process continues. And it seems furthermore reasonable to conclude that this horizontal self-coordination performs adequately, since highly conflicting matters that have to be solved on ministers’ level, or even need the Chancellor to get involved (as in the case of emissions trading) are not reported that often – at least publicly.

4.4 Changing German federal government coordination from an institutional policy perspective

As has become obvious from the case study above, evidence of change in federal government coordination in Germany is rare. This is partly due to a lack of recent (empirical) research, but also seems due to a lack of “real” change. From an institutional policy perspective, no central actor driving forward change can be identified. The role of the Chancellery seems ambiguous and there is no account that the Ministry of Finance (as in the case of Denmark) has ambitions to change coordination processes. However, three changes can be observed.

First, the creation of the Ministry of Economics and Labour represents an example of strategic *ad hoc* change, triggered by arguments for changing pre-existing structures in order to amend

sector-oriented conflict features, rather than motivated by mere institutional arguments focusing on the machinery of government.

Second, the revision of the GGO can – as far as we know – be judged the most far-reaching amendment of horizontal coordination, even though the effects are not yet clear. This revision was part of the overall modernisation and de-bureaucratisation policy of federal government. Whereas the actual process of revision can be interpreted as an attempt to amend coordination in a self-reflexive and intentional matter, the revision of the GGO is (considered overall) only one among several projects of the modernisation program. This program is mainly concerned with electronic provision of governmental services, modernising human resource management and de-regulation efforts. It seems thus plausible to interpret the cabinet decision for revision as a policy decision within the overall program, aiming to signal that government itself contributes to the modernisation. More generally, the revision of the GGO as such can be considered a self-reflexive change in the German federal government machine, but not the overall modernisation program

Third, the amendment of the GOBReg allotting a new initiative power to the Minister of Consumer Protection can be interpreted as a rather symbolic change. Consumer protection has been highly prioritized since the BSE crisis, and it seems plausible to conclude that the amendment of the GOBReg was triggered by this policy priority. This interpretation gains in plausibility because it has not become known that this initiative competence has so far been activated.

More generally, it can be concluded that the degree of change in federal government coordination is low, it is based on *ad hoc* rather than self-reflexive attempts, and it is motivated by policy concerns in the respective policy domain.

5. Country study: Sweden

5.1 Institutional Context

The Swedish constitution does not impose many regulations on the government's organisation and working methods. Nevertheless it does entail provisions, and this gives Swedish central government a rather unique profile (Larsson 1995). The single constitutional provision that shapes central government decision making and coordination within the government the most is the demand for collective decision-making as formulated in RF Ch. 7§3. Indeed, there are only few types of decisions an individual minister can take by himself, mostly concerning the internal organisation and staffing of his department (Larsson 1994). The nearly total ban on "ministerial rule" leads to a system of decision-making "which is collective in the extreme and individual ministers may decide on themselves only in exceptional circumstances" (Larsson 1995).

Furthermore the constitution regulates some aspects of the composition of government: The government consists of the Prime Minister and a number of Ministers, and for the preparation of government businesses there has to be a chancery (*regeringskansliet*), divided into different ministries, but there is not a prescribed allocation of portfolios. The Prime Minister appoints the ministers and chooses among them the heads of the respective ministries. This means that not every minister in Sweden heads an own ministry: of the current 21 Swedish Ministers only 10 are official heads of a ministry, while the others only have certain portfolios within one ministry. However there is no formal hierarchy in cabinet meetings between the different kinds of ministers (Larsson 1995).

The chancery combines two organisational principles in one organisation: a specialized, hierarchically bureaucracy at the bottom, and a collective decision-making body on top (Petersson 1989).³⁵

³⁵ In 1965 a great reform of the internal organisation of the ministries took place, which basically defined the current "standard model" of ministerial organisation, which has applied since, with greater or lesser variations, to all ministries (Petersson 2003). A single ministry is headed by 1-3 ministers, each having a small personal staff of press officers and political advisers at hand. The second ranking positions within the ministry are occupied by 1-4 political recruited state secretaries, who run the daily business of the ministry. Additionally, there are two career civil servants at the top of the ministry, the chief legal adviser (*rättschefen*) and the permanent secretary (*expeditionschef*), but the formal position at the top of the ministries gives a rather distorted picture of their actual influence - they are rather technical than political advisers (Larsson 2001). Below the political level the ministries are divided into "integrated matters areas" (*sakenheter*) which handle all types of issues within a specified matter area, i.e. drafting bills, dealing with budgetary issues, writing commission directives and maintaining contact with relevant agencies (Larsson 1995) The Swedish expression *enhet* (unit) is not used in a consistent way by the ministries: sometimes "sakenhet" is the smallest working unit as part of a larger

Like Denmark, Sweden also features an impressive record of minority governments. Indeed, in Sweden minority governments are the rule and majority coalitions stay the exception (Bergman 2000). This has certain implications for coordination within government: in cases of minority government the interests of third parties have to be taken into account, without them being represented in government, while coalition governments are need internal coordination between the different parties.

In marked contrast to Denmark and Germany, Sweden did not join the European Union until 1995. As Sweden joined the European Union that late, we can assume that the internal adaptation to be able to “speak with one voice in Brussels” (Sundström 2001) has been taking place in a far more conscious way than in Germany, for example.

Although Swedish “culture of consensus and cooperation” has been used almost as a stereotype internationally, there is a substantial core to this cliché that we have to take into account. As in the case of Denmark, the Swedish administrative culture has been described as cooperative, consensus seeking, problem oriented and pragmatic (Jann 1983; 2000). Additionally it is characterized by a high degree of informality, bridging organisational borders and hierarchical levels, as studies of the ministry-agency relationship show (Pierre/Ehn 1999; Hwang 2000).

5.2 The coordination process in Swedish central government

5.2.1 Ministerial portfolio allocation

Departmental reshuffles have not been an uncommon feature in the Swedish chancery since the departemental reform of 1840, but they only became more frequent in the second half of the 20th century.³⁶ For our purposes, we picked two recent major reshuffles for analysis: the creation of the chancery as a single, integrated organisation, in 1997 and the formation of the “superministry for economic growth” in 1998.

department (*avdelning*), sometimes enheter are even subdivide into sub-units. There are in total 163 units within the chancery, differing considerable in size, ranging from less to 6 to more than 30 employees, with an average size of 12 (Riksdagens Revisorer 2001).

³⁶ For an overview of departmental reorganisation which can't be given here see Larsson (1990), Premfors (1999) and Persson (2003). One explanation of the modest changes up till the 1970s is that constitutional provisions complicated the reorganisation. From 1918 until 1941 the constitution limited the number of ministries to 8 to 10, since then the change had to be accomplished by a law, which proved difficult and cumbersome, especially in minority government situations. As a compensation, matters and responsibilities were shifted frequently between the ministries (Larsson 1986).

In 1997 all Swedish ministries and the prime minister's office were merged into a new, single organisation, now officially called "Regeringskansliet". The decision to merge the ministries taken by the government was prepared by a group within the Prime Minister's Office, chaired by the state secretary Hans Dahlgren (*Dahlgren-gruppen*).³⁷ The goals of the reform were very ambitious and comprised a variety of objectives: demoting sector thinking and promoting coordination, introducing rational game rules for interaction as well as enhancing the administrative efficiency of the organisation.³⁸ Jacobson (2001) suggests that this variety of goals was the result of a "garbage can process" in which a variety of the "eternal" problems lingering around in the chancery were attached to the solution of amalgamating the chancery. However, the evaluations of this attempt to change coordination patterns present sobering results. Neither at unit level, nor at the political level, could changes of coordination procedures be observed (Jacobsson 2001; Riksdagens Revisorer 2001). As the analysis of six typical process within the chancery shows, business by civil servants was done much in the same way as before (Ehn et al. 2001). As Levin and Tegel (2002) put it, "The core work process in the 150 units hasn't been affected at all by the amalgamation". Even the evaluation by the administrative office is quite careful of judging the reform in terms of changed routines and coordination forms, instead pointing out that the changes have to be seen in a longer perspective, from even before 1997, and that the chancery had gained increased flexibility for internal reshuffles (Regeringskansliet 2003).

In 1998 Göran Persson announced the second large organisational reshuffle of the 1990s, the creation of a "superministry" for industry (*näringsdepartement*). The declared goals of the reform were quite similar to the one underlying the amalgamation one year earlier: to improve coordination between the relevant ministries, to break inter ministerial rivalries and to foster a new, integrated organisational culture (Persson 2003). The policy goal underlying the reform can be seen to create the organisational preconditions for a coordinated policy to produce sustainable economic growth. The political motives behind this decision are best described by the position Göran Persson was facing after the 1998 elections. Having suffered a dramatical electoral defeat, he now wanted to present a new and unexpected move to the public to

³⁷ There was a total of three decisions, for detailed accounts of the process see Erlandsson (2000) Riksdagens Revisorer (2001) and even Regeringskansliet (2003).

³⁸ For a detailed enumeration, see Levin and Tegel (2002).

demonstrate his willingness for a renewal of his policy.³⁹ Thus, these reforms had considerable symbolic content, demonstrating a new beginning for the new government (Persson 2003).⁴⁰

The creation of the super-department has not been subject to any systematic evaluation so far, but it appears that the effects of the reorganisations have been marginal at best, as described by Persson (2003). There are approaches towards some kind of project organisation (Statskonsult 2001), but the overall picture shows little organisational change at the unit level. Most of the units grew larger and some units have been abolished, but the organisation has been far less innovative than claimed by the reform. And there still seem to be cultural divides within the ministry, which is not surprising given the short time which has elapsed since the reorganisation (Regeringskansliet 2003). Additionally, after the 2002 election the number of ministers within the ministry was increased to three, with a minister for Industry and Trade, a minister for communications and regional policy and a minister for employment, which resembles the organisation before the merger (Persson 2003).

5.2.2 Administrative Stage

The process of administrative coordination within the chancery has been often described as being highly rule-bound and procedural, supplemented by varieties of informal procedures for day to day business. Two procedural provisions structure the inter-ministerial coordination at the rank and file level: joint preparation (*gemensama beredning*) and sharing (*delning*). The method of joint preparation is regulated in the Chanceries instructions (cf. e.g. SFS 1996:1515 §§ 13, 15) and supplemented by an internal regulation of the PMO.

Joint preparation is applied if a matter involves more than one ministry. For matters that have economic consequences or which are of political importance, the ministry of finance or the PMO have to be involved respectively; for EU-matters the special EU unit within the PMO has to be involved. Surprisingly enough, the actual method of coordination itself is open to the participating units, and therefore it can be accomplished either in writing or by direct contact. Only in rare cases when consent could not be achieved are matters lifted to the state

³⁹ Indeed, the plans for the reshuffle had already been prepared before the elections under high secrecy, by Göran Persson, his state secretary Pär Nuder and Ulf Larsson, a former state secretary under Olof Palme, as a loyal adviser (Persson 2003).

⁴⁰ Another motive might have been an institutional adaptation to a merger that took place a few years before at the agency level, where three agencies, devoted to energy technological research and economic development, had been merged, resulting in three ministries having a stake in one and the same agency (Pierre 2004).

secretary or, in the extreme, to the ministerial level (Riksdagens Revisorer 2001). While joint preparation takes place in the earlier phase of decision-making, sharing is the last stage before a matter is decided upon by the cabinet. Sharing basically means circulating a final draft of a government proposition, ordinance or commission directive. The PMO keeps lists of who is participates in sharing for which issues. Only when the ministry of finance, the PMO and ministry of justice have answered, and no other participant disagrees, can the matter be brought to decision (Riksdagens Revisorer 2001).⁴¹

The description of the administrative coordination process given by Larsson (1986) nearly twenty years ago differs somewhat from that given by Jacobson (2001) and colleagues (Sundström 1999; Ehn u.a. 2001) in more recent studies. Both camps agree that coordination work is highly formalized by routines and procedures, according to which even new tasks are handled, while at the same time there was and is considerable degree of informality, which makes formal rules more feasible for day to day business. Larsson observed the relationship between the ministries and the units as sectorized and characterized by units each guarding their competencies and bureaucratic turf, resulting in vertical rather than horizontal communication and coordination patterns. In marked contrast, Jacobson (2001) considers the units being relatively open-minded to cross ministerial cooperation and that informal coordination at the unit level is working pretty well. For example, Jacobson and his colleagues observe a very active environmental ministry, which even seeks suggestions from other ministries, claiming that coordination between units “usually works pretty smoothly” (Ehn u.a. 2001; Jacobsson 2001). The overall mode of decision-making is primarily negative coordination, which offers other affected ministries veto positions, but is only partially based on a cooperative preparation of issues. Larsson additionally makes an important point when he characterizes the coordination as being “quiet coordination”, i.e. the position of the other units or departments are anticipated and have been accounted for well before any coordination actually happens (1986).

There are two focal actors which hold institutionally vested influence over most of preparation taking place within the chancery. First, there is the PMO. The prime minister has at his hand a staff of political advisers, who follow closely the developments within the ministries and policy fields. The influence of the PMO is primarily a question of whether there is conflict between ministries or not (Larsson 1994). If there is conflict, the PMO tries to

⁴¹ For EU matters special routines were set up, but a detailed account of EU matters would go well beyond the scope of this paper.

settle these conflicts. But the PMO's political units lack the staff to get a real grip on the matters in detail and even initiate and drive own priorities; the primary mode of behaviour is rather reactive to demands from within and outside the chancery. The PMO has been described as rather weak during the 1970s and 1980s (Larsson 1986), and only recently has gained in importance, mainly by running the EU-coordination within the chancery (Elder/Page 2000; Levin/ Tegle 2002).

Being involved in all economic matters, the ministry of finance (MFi), or, better, the budget department within this ministry, is the central hub within the coordination system. For each ministry there are usually 3-4 civil servants functioning as "contact-officers" (*kontaktmän*) to the other departments. Thus the MFi is much better suited for a permanent scrutiny of the other ministries work than the PMO. And indeed, with the monopoly of macroeconomic knowledge the ministry can quite effectively limit the other ministries' room for manoeuvring. (Larsson 1994). Nevertheless, the contacts on unit level between the MFi and the other ministries are not necessarily conflictive, as Jacobsson notes (2001).

Changes of the administrative coordination mechanisms inside the chancery have been basically pushed from two sides. First, and probably more importantly, the EU-membership and the Swedish EU Presidency in 2001 pushed the demand for a coherent and coordinated Swedish position. Thus a range of new coordination rules and coordination bodies were introduced⁴², prepared mostly within or close to the PMO. After first trying to coordinate EU matters within the foreign ministry, Göran Persson pursued a centralization of EU matters within the PMO, which now features a special EU-coordination unit. This resulted in quite a shift of power towards the PMO (Persson 2003). The new institutions indeed had some effects on the coordination patterns (for example, certain kind of memos are prepared before meetings and staff participates in interministerial working groups), but as Sundström shows, the real, substantial coordination is still taking place according to the conventional procedures (Sundström 1999).

The second driver of change is administrative reform efforts, primarily pushed by the budget department, the department for public administration in the ministry of justice, and the administrative office (as part of the PMO). These units are strong advocates of internal, rationalistic management tools and controlling systems, which aim to introduce techniques of

⁴² For an overview of the regulations for handling of EU-matters see Utrikesdepartementet (2003); for a description of special bodies see Statskontoret (2000).

management of results even within the chancery. So far, these attempts have basically resulted in more detailed regulated processes within the chancery, while the actual process and learned routines have hardly changed (Jacobsson 2001).

5.2.3 Administrative-Political Stage

Administrative-political contacts have been described as fairly frequent and more common than in the other Nordic countries (Jacobsson et al. 2001). They take place within formalized weekly preparations (*veckoberedningar*) or in a more *ad hoc* way and are described as rather informal and open: Larsson speaks of “broken hierarchies”, which means that civil servants might even present their case directly to the minister (Larsson 1986). For the most, these contacts serve the purpose of getting political blessing for a civil servant’s actions, informing the political level, and involving the leadership in cases of conflict and trouble shooting (Sundström 1999).

Little research has been directed towards coordination on the level of state secretaries as a second way to connect the administrative to the political sphere, and therefore we only have a sketchy picture of this process. The state secretaries of the ministries meet in various *ad hoc* groups and at least once a week during a lunch chaired by the state secretary of the PMO, (*statssekreterarluncher*). This gives an opportunity for coordination at a lower political level, which is welcomed by most of the participants (Larsson 1986). The special EU-coordination body however seems not be an important arena for interministerial conflict resolution (Sundström 1999). While the state of research does not allow estimates of the change of coordination between state secretaries, the picture of intra-departmental coordination seems pretty stable (Larsson 1986; Jacobsson 2001).

4.2.4 Political Stage

The constitutional demand for collective decision-making results in unusually frequent cabinet meetings: the Swedish cabinet is probably the one with the most collective meetings in Europe (Elder/ Page 2000). There are formal cabinet meetings (*regeringssammanträdet*) at least once a week during which all decisions have to be formally taken, usually without discussion. In fact, these meetings are mostly of a formal nature to register the decisions already informally taken (Halvarson et al. 2003). Important matters have been discussed earlier by the ministers, during the more informal session, the so called *allmänberedning*,

which takes place after the formal meetings every Thursday. It is here that important political matters are discussed. Usually they are presented by the minister in charge, sometimes supported by civil servants. Voting is not common at these meetings; indeed, “the decision rule within cabinet is best described as consensus defined by the Prime Minister” (Bergman 2003). Larsson estimates only 1-2% of the decision are taken up for discussion in these meetings because most of the other matters usually have been already “administratively coordinated” and conflict resolved before the cabinet level is reached (Larsson 1995). In addition to the weekly meetings, there are daily lunchtime meetings (*lunchberedningen*) between all ministers present in Stockholm, which offer another arena for coordination in an informal setting. Typical matters discussed include appointments.

These collective forms of cabinet decision-making seem to have been remarkably stable during the last 20 years, except that the importance of the lunchtime meetings seems to have slowly eroded, as it became increasingly difficult for the ministers to gather every day in Stockholm (Larsson 1994). Otherwise, the results of Larsson’s research from 1986 hardly differ from more recent descriptions, which means that the lunch-meetings are still a meaningful arena for an informal exchange between the ministers (e.g.: Riksdagens Revisorer 2001; Petersson 2003).

Although considered constitutionally feasible,⁴³ cabinet committees or inner cabinets have not been a common feature of Swedish central government (Larsson 1994). In 1990, the then Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson established three cabinet committees to enhance coordination between intertwined policy fields, but these committees were rather short lived: after the electoral defeat only one year later, the new non-socialist government did not continue them.⁴⁴ Coming back to office in 1994 Carlsson did not renew them either and instead chose to introduce “minister contracts” between him and the individual ministers to commit them to his austerity policy (Persson 2003: 240). The incumbent Prime Minister Göran Persson abolished these systems as being alien to the Swedish idea of collective decision-making and chose instead more informal cabinet groups, organized *ad hoc* to prepare a matter for discussion within the cabinet (Persson 2003).⁴⁵

⁴³ Proposition 1973:60 p.181, see Persson (2003).

⁴⁴ These committees, one each for security, industry and welfare policy, each had its own staff within the Prime Minister’s Office. To coordinate these groups, even a kind of “meta committee” consisting of the PM and the chairmen of the three committees was established (Ruin 1991).

⁴⁵ In 2003 three groups were known to operate, dealing with the issues of labour supply, demographic change and sustainable development (Persson 2003: 241).

Highly institutionalised arenas for conflict resolution and coordination within government coalitions can be observed. Even though these are primarily established for political coordination, they create another politico-administrative nexus. When the conservative government of 1976 came to power, each party leader (except the Prime Minister, having his office) was given a staff of political advisers within the chancery to coordinate cabinet matters and keep them up-to-date with the ministry's work. These coordination offices (*samordningskanslier*) were kind of "mini-PMOs" within the ministries the party leaders were heading. The extent to which these offices acted as tools for effective coordination is ambiguous. The distrustful monitoring of even the smaller matters within the ministries had the tendency to even increase political conflict (Larsson 1986; Bergman 2000). Having these experiences in mind, the 1991 coalition set up a much more integrated system with a common staff located within the PMO, consisting of state secretaries. This system is reported to have worked reasonably well, especially compared to the former system with three coordination bodies (Bergman 2000). After the last general election new forms of cooperation between the tolerating parties and the government were established as the result of the vigorous demands by the Greens for a formal coalition (Aylott/ Bergman 2004). New offices, this time labelled collaboration offices (*samarbetskanslier*), were placed within the chancery, comprising eight political advisers for each parties (Ullström 2005).⁴⁶ As Ullström shows, the effect of these offices on the coordination within the government is ambiguous. While the coordination between the three parties and the realization of the toleration agreement are certainly facilitated, the early inclusion of diverging interests into the preparation of matters puts a heavy burden on the chancery and threatens the possibility of the government formulating a coherent position *before* the other parties are involved.

5.3 The Pattern of Coordination

If we distil the characteristics of coordination out of our necessarily sketchy description, what does the Swedish pattern look like? Coordination at the administrative level is characterized

⁴⁶ Only formally integrated into the administrative office of the PMO, the toleration parties chose to spread them across the ministries considered important for their policy goals, with both parties concentrating advisers on the ministries of finance. Indeed this construction was chosen to avoid a social democratic state secretary being the nearest superior. Within the ministries, they are not integrated into the line hierarchy, but instead all access to and information from the civil servants is channelled through the state secretary of the respective parties. As a result, these advisers still consider themselves to be much more a party employee than a civil servant within the chancery. Besides the offices, the parties established other coordination and conflict resolution panels at a higher political level, up to a common breakfast meeting of the party leaders. For the other forms of cooperation see also Ullström (2005).

by strong procedural rules, which stayed remarkable stable during the period under study. The challenge of EU membership and increased efforts of public administrative reform within the chancery led mostly to the change of formal rules, while the informal standard operating procedures used for interdepartmental conflict resolution and coordination persisted. Both Jacobson and Sundström interpret the changes of administrative coordination as cases of “organisational decoupling”, i.e. the use of the new rules primarily for legitimising the own behaviour, while day to day business still conforms to the formerly established routines.

The primary mode of coordination can be described as “negative coordination” between units, which mainly define their interest along the organisational border of the ministry or even the unit, but which also anticipate the other ministries’ interests and intentions well in advance to avoid conflict and thus ease the necessary coordination. In day to day business the politico-administrative linkage is usually provided by the state secretaries in a rather informal way and internally by weekly meetings between the civil servants and the political hierarchy.

At the political level, we see, as expected from the institutional heritage, a dominance of collective decision-making. Frequent, informal cabinet meetings allow consultation with the other members of government about important matters. Attempts to introduce cabinet committees did not prove to be successful and thus were replaced by more informal methods. Besides the rather informal meetings of party leaders, predominantly structural solutions have been sought for meeting the demands of coalition management. With the establishment of special offices for the coalition parties, and recently even for the tolerating parties, a further linkage between the political and the administrative level is created. Indeed, multi-level hierarchies for coordination and conflict resolution were created, where conflicts can be settled at the lowest possible level, i.e. in the cooperation office, rather than at a party leaders meetings. The effect of these arrangements is rather ambiguous, however. While they certainly support intra coalitional coordination, they might also negatively affect the chancery’s performance as a whole by injecting an additional set of diverging interests into the already sectorized chancery (Larsson 1986; Elder/ Page 2000; Ullström 2005).

Certainly, the two major organisational reshuffles in the 1990s had only a marginal effect on coordination mechanisms within the core executive. They neither effectively redrew the organisational borders between the ministries nor did they change the mode of governance between conflicting interests from bargaining into a hierarchical one. In case of the 1997

reform, only the outer boundaries were redrawn; in case of the 1998 reform they were indeed changed, but the former ministries are now divisions within the new ministry, with each division again headed by an independent minister. Thus the reforms have to be seen primarily from their symbolic content, as even pointed out by the Dahlgren group itself (Persson 2003).

5.4 Changing Swedish central government coordination from an institutional policy perspective

If we now apply our conceptual lens of “institutional policy”, what do we see? First, we can interpret the major reshuffles as attempts of institutional policy. The two reorganisations were a deliberate attempt by the Prime Minister and his state secretaries to increase the potential for coordination in the government. Indeed, the need for a more coordinated and less fragmented government is one of the most prominent goals used by the government in order to stress reforms and to justify administrative reform (Erlandsson 2000). The question remains whether these reforms were primarily aimed at giving a symbol of unity, as Levin and Tegle suggest (2002), or whether the change of macro structure was actually believed to have an impact on the coordination patterns. That there have been various inquiries⁴⁷ commissioned by the government to study the coordination mechanisms suggests that there was at least some reflexivity in this process, although Sundström notes that argumentation and recommendations of these inquiries are related mainly to international role models, and only in a limited extent to the actual process and practices within the chancery (1999). Although not discussed in detail in this paper, further study of the EU-coordination mechanisms would be in order here, as it seems that the PMO was able to gain a central role in coordination by moving away powers from the foreign ministry to its own realm.

Secondly, attempts by the sitting prime ministers to rearrange coordination at cabinet level have been rather short-lived and policy driven, as when Prime Minister Carlsson tried to implement his austerity policy. The introduction of different coalition management techniques was primarily a necessity forced upon the actors from outside: there was a need to integrate the interests of the different parties supporting the government in parliament, even if this resulted in a decrease of the overall government office performance.

⁴⁷ But not in the form of an *ad hoc* commission, but rather through inquiries by special agencies and from groups within the chancery.

Thirdly, we only see minor changes at the administrative coordination level, although a variety of actors pursuing administrative reform policy try to shape these procedures: the administration office inside the PMO, the budget department and the ministry of justice. Little is known so far about the interaction and rivalries between these actors, and whether they stick to their informal division of labour.

To sum up, we see a twofold picture of institutional policy in Sweden. On the one hand, we see structural and (formal) procedural adaptations to the EU membership, and on the other we see departmental reshuffles which have little effect in actual business but bear a symbolic content. Thus, we might rate the overall change as medium, but with two logics: one of necessary adaptation, and one of a more symbolic character, but both pursued mainly from within the PMO. It is possible that there are competing institutional actors, primarily pursuing administrative reform policy, but the current state of research suggests that the relationship is not conflicting but rather complementary instead.

6. Comparison: Central government coordination in Denmark, Sweden and Germany – An institutional policy perspective

Table 1 presents the central comparative observations of the coordination processes in the three countries under study. In the following section we aim to sum up and elaborate the similarities and differences in coordination processes as well as in the institutional policy perspectives.

	Denmark	Germany	Sweden
Most relevant institutional variable(s)	Departmental principle & coalition politics	Departmental principle & strong Chancellor & coalitional politics	Collective decision-making
Stages in the coordination process			
Administrative	Negative coordination, (informal networks)	Negative coordination, (GGO)	Negative coordination, (joint preparation and sharing)
Administrative-political	Groups of state secretaries preparing cabinet committees	Group of state secretaries preparing cabinet	Informal meetings of state secretaries, “broken hierarchies” linking the levels
Political	Cabinet committees	Coalition bodies	Informal cabinet meetings
Coordination pattern	Horizontal self-coordination by informal networks, Last-instance conflict-solving institutionalised on ministers level (cabinet committees)	Horizontal self-coordination by anticipation of formalized procedures, Last instance conflict-solving outside (formal) government (coalition bodies)	Horizontal self-coordination by formalized procedures, Informal meetings of ministers as last resort
Institutional policy			
Central actors	Ministry of Finance Prime Ministers Office	-	Prime Ministers Office, public administration reformers
Objects	Procedural techniques (decree 1998), structural techniques (preparing committees for cabinet committees)	Procedural techniques (revision GGO)	Ministerial portfolio allocation (<i>superdepartment & regeringskansliet</i>), structural and procedural techniques for EU coordination
Interests	Institutional self-interest	Policy domain	Capacity to govern
Degree of self-reflexivity	High (Ministry of Finance)	Almost none	Medium
Degree of Change	Low	Very low	Medium
Logic of Change	Fragmented institutional politics	Policy-driven institutional politics	Adaptive <i>and</i> symbolic institutional politics

Table 1: Comparison

The process of coordination

In the administrative stage, it is first striking that negative coordination prevails and that second, the techniques used to confine the effects vary. At first sight, this strong commonality (negative coordination) could come as a surprise, since prevalence of the departmental principle is frequently cited as a cause of negative coordination. But since the Swedish constitution does not provide the departmental principle, this can not be the stand-alone argument for the prevalence of negative coordination in the administrative stage of coordination. Further organisational features of ministerial organisation have to be taken into account: ministerial organisations are basically characterized by sector-specific specialization and division of labour (by the allocation of portfolios), resulting in selective perception, focusing on their own organisation's point of view. Ministerial organisations often represent cognitive pillars, finally resulting in prevailing patterns of negative coordination.⁴⁸ Thus, the departmental principle seems to support the incentives for negative coordination, but it is also triggered by the organisational structure of ministerial administration.

A closer look on the coordination techniques reveals country-specific differences. Whereas in Denmark coordination in the administrative stage relies upon informality to a large extent, formal rules apply in Germany, and Sweden represents a mixed type. These differences can be considered against the background of different constitutional traditions: whereas the German constitution (and even its predecessor in the Weimar republic) explicitly requires rules of procedure for federal government, neither the Danish nor the Swedish constitution provide any procedural regulations for central government. From here, one could argue, the differences in the dominating coordination techniques derive. In Germany, for example, formal procedures are highly appreciated, basically representing the central placement of the concept of the *Rechtstaat* within political and administrative behaviour. In Denmark however, this absence of formally established rules of procedure has been functionally replaced by informal networks fulfilling commonly (normatively) accepted procedural functions. It is difficult to imagine such a thing happening in Germany. In Sweden, the formal rules are primarily used as a last resort, for legitimizing one's own actions and in case informal coordination fails.

More generally, there is not a major account of substantial change in the administrative stage of coordination: slight procedural formalisation in Denmark, a revision of the GGO in

⁴⁸ It is exactly the same argument here, that also accounts for the relevance of ministerial portfolio allocation.

Germany and a somewhat stable picture, with trends to further formalisation in Sweden. This stability can on the one hand be interpreted as a signal that the addressees of coordinated policy proposals are somehow satisfied. This interpretation is very much in contrast to the driving forces of the planning debate thirty years ago, which was mainly concerned about establishing structures in order to avoid negative coordination and its side-effects. On the other hand, this stability could also be interpreted as an overall lack of political interest in horizontal coordination, which may be conceived instead as a taken-for-granted function performed by ministerial bureaucracies.

When looking at the administrative-political stage of coordination, regular meetings of state secretaries take place in all the three countries. However, whereas in Germany and Sweden all state-secretaries are included on a regular basis, in Denmark only the state secretaries from ministries represented in one of the two important cabinet committees meet and reflects a more specialized structure than in the other two cases. This specialised structure has not until recently been established as a consequence of the institutionalization of cabinet committees and might indicate that the coordination-load is higher in Denmark: whereas in Sweden and Germany the regular meetings of all state secretaries fulfil a very general bottle-neck function, the establishment of a more specialized structure could be interpreted as reaction towards an increasing number of unsolved issues and thus was created in order to prevent cabinet committees from overload. In addition, it finally links the distinct patterns in the administrative-political stage with the political one.

Regarding the political stage of coordination processes, it has become evident that in none of our cases is the formal cabinet meeting the place for central conflict-solving, even though officially the highest ranking executive body and meeting regularly. Not only requirements from day-to-day work in modern central government (time pressure), but also constitutional provisions and political motivations set incentives to side-step cabinet from an individual minister's perspective. In all the three countries, final conflict-solving has been shifted towards smaller, more specialized instances. The features of these instances do differ, however. In this regard, arguments from political traditions hold strong. In Sweden informal meetings of either the whole cabinet or between single ministers are last-resorts for high-ranking conflict-solving, and no need for special bodies arises because coalition arithmetic does not need to be balanced. In contrast, cabinet committees in Denmark and coalition bodies in Germany represent places for final conflict-solving. Both are informal as they are

neither prescribed nor ruled by any formal provisions, but both are rather institutionalized and mainly serve as balancers for coalitional arithmetic. But whereas the two important Danish cabinet committees meet regularly, German coalitional bodies are only consulted in cases of necessity. It is difficult to assess why final decision-making in the Danish case remains within in government, whereas in Germany it is delegated to a body including non-governmental politicians. Two speculative arguments may, however, help to interpret these differences.

First, one could argue that minority governments are under stronger pressure to produce intra-governmental consent because they bear a constant risk of being defeated in parliament. But for more specific version of this argument, a closer look on executive-legislative relationships in a Danish-German comparison would be necessary.

Second, it would seem plausible to interpret the regular, institutionalized cabinet committees as a sign that more unsolved conflicts reach the political stage, so that a regular attempt on the ministerial level to resolve conflicts is required. In contrast, in Germany the formal procedures only rarely produce conflicts that require ministers' attention and demand a specialized body. Further specification of this argument, however, would require a comparative analysis of single coordination processes.

To sum up, the political stage of coordination in comparison is first characterized by cabinets presenting formal ratification bodies for issues agreed upon in advance, and second reveals country-specific techniques for final conflict-solving, which arise from different political requirements.

More generally, a comparative analysis of the coordination processes reveals a common basic pattern of coordination (negative coordination) arising from the typical pillared organisation of ministerial bureaucracy. When it comes to the techniques, however, country-specific profiles can be identified, which arise from both different constitutional and political traditions. Very roughly, it seems that in Denmark the coordination process is rather more specialized and institutionalized (on a regular basis) in both the administrative-political and the political stage than in the other two countries. However, it is difficult to assess the causes behind these different traits.

Institutional policy

Turning our attention to our institutional perspective, we see institutional inertia rather than change in Germany; we see some institutional policy in Sweden, which we described as adaptive and symbolic; and finally we see few changes in Denmark, where institutional policy is dispersed and fragmented.

If we consider the different actors and agendas of institutional policy, we see the absence of any central actor in Germany, but in Denmark and Sweden we have a few actors on the scene. In the case of Sweden different actors can be observed, pursuing different (but not necessarily conflicting) goals as it seems, while at the same time there is a strong belief within the government that more coordination is needed, probably resulting in a common problem-definition. Until now, there seems to be an informal but stable division of labour between these actors that does not adversely affect the chances of a coherent institutional policy. In Denmark, there are basically two actors, the PMO and the Ministry of Finance, competing for a pivotal role within central government. This results in struggles for policy territory and strategic capacity, rather than creating an interest in enhancing overall governmental performance. This leads to fragmentation than coherence in institutional politics.

If we look at the objects of institutional policy, we see changes in all three of our categories: portfolio allocation, structural techniques and procedural techniques. No easy pattern is discernible, with the exception of Germany. Ministerial portfolio allocation can be a way of changing the prerequisites of coordination, but the evidence presented here shows that for all countries, even for Sweden, a variety of solely political considerations are involved. These changes seem to be mostly policy-driven, since they are used to either react to external demands in times of crisis or heightened public attention, or to change the rules of the game within policy fields: for example, to break resistance within certain policy sectors. In terms of structural changes, we find intentional changes in Denmark and Sweden, but none in Germany. Even if formally changed, the procedural techniques seem to be rather institutionally “sticky” in practice, as can be observed in all of our three case studies. As actors in Germany concentrated their efforts in accordance to the German rule-based administrative tradition of procedural techniques, this might help to clarify some of the inertia observed: in order to introduce change, German government merely falls back on a standard operating repertoire. In contrast, Sweden and Denmark use the whole toolbox, including

structural techniques, to change coordination patterns. Therefore one might suppose that these actors “understood governance” (Jensen 2004) more than was the case in Germany.

Focusing on the interests pursued and the degree of self-reflexivity, three different combinations are revealed. In Denmark, both the PMO and the Ministry of Finance pursued their own institutional self-interests, attempting to enhance their power position within central government when establishing change. However, Jensen shows that the Ministry of Finance has a high degree of self-reflexivity, while this is difficult to assess for the PMO. In Germany, changes are mainly motivated by goals within the respective policy domain and on a general level without any self-reflexivity. In Sweden, the overall capacity to govern has motivated change, accompanied by a medium degree of self-reflexivity. Thus, the Swedish case comes closest to the ideal-type of institutional politics.

These different combinations of actors, objects, interests and degrees of self-reflexivity amount to the different logical approaches to change that account for the varying degrees of change. Therefore, an overall institutional policy perspective shows fragmented institutional politics in Denmark, policy-driven institutional politics in Germany and adaptive and symbolic institutional politics in Sweden.

Finally, a more general interpretation of these observations might also be in order. Focusing on the demand for institutional change, we clearly see Sweden in a position in the 1990s in which it had to quickly adapt to the demands of the European Union. This meant there was a real need to find solutions for formulating coherent policies. Additionally, the constitutional demand for collective decision-making might result in a higher perceived need for coordination, which as one of the “eternal problems” recurs again and again. This real and perceived demand for coordination might trigger more conscious attempts to improve the preconditions of coordination, and even symbolic policy might be an appropriate tool to meet the perceived need. As a second explanation, the traditions of reflexivity are an important precondition for institutional policy. Both Denmark and Sweden have a tradition of regularly reviewing the foundations of government by setting up special commissions or internal groups within the government. In contrast, the core executive organisation has hardly been under review in Germany since the planning debate, and the few reviews that have occurred have, been primarily concerned with matters of technical efficiency.

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