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Explaining Chief Executive Empowerment: EU Summitry and Domestic Institutional Change

KARL MAGNUS JOHANSSON and JONAS TALLBERG

One of the most prominent trends in the organisation of European parliamentary democracies is the empowerment of chief executives. This article submits that an important reason contributing to this development is summit decision-making in the European Union, which requires states to confer additional authority, discretion and resources on chief executives. The effects are long-term shifts in the domestic institutional balance of power between the executive and the legislature, as well as within the executive branch. The explanatory power of this argument is tested through a case study of chief executive empowerment in Sweden, as well as comparative qualitative evidence from a broader set of European states. The findings carry implications for research on the presidentialisation of politics, the domestic implications of international cooperation, and the Europeanisation of EU member countries.

One of the most prominent trends in the organisation of modern democratic systems is the empowerment of chief executives. Regardless of whether they operate in presidential, semi-presidential or parliamentary systems, national chief executives tend to have become politically more powerful and autonomous – vis-à-vis legislatures, parties and other ministers within the executive (Peters *et al.* 2000a). This pattern is particularly notable among European parliamentary democracies, where there is comparative empirical evidence in favour of a trend of ‘presidentialisation’, despite constitutional provisions that work against a centralisation of authority in the chief executive (Poguntke and Webb 2005a). How may this development be explained? Why have chief executives gained in power – especially in European parliamentary democracies, and particularly at a time when state authority is commonly regarded as eroded by globalisation?

In this article, we claim that an important part of the explanation for the domestic empowerment of European chief executives is the

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institutionalisation of summit decision-making in the European Union over the past three decades. While originally established as a forum for informal talks between heads of state and government, the European Council has evolved into the supreme political body of the EU. In effect, all major decisions in the EU nowadays go through the European Council in some shape or form. This development has benefited national chief executives – not only by offering access to a new and exclusive political arena, but also by generating domestic institutional change in their favour. More specifically, we suggest that the growth in prominence of the European Council has presented EU member states with functional pressures for the conferral of authority, discretion and resources on chief executives. Each causal mechanism involves adaptation of domestic procedures and practices to the functional prerequisites of summitry, with implications for the balance of power between executives and legislatures, and the balance of power within the executive. Authority for chief executives to represent the state across the full range of issues addressed in the European Council constitutes a precondition for participation, but shifts power away from executive and legislative actors that otherwise would enjoy prerogatives in these areas. Discretion is required for chief executives to negotiate effectively in the European Council, but comes at the expense of traditional legislative oversight. Resources are necessary for chief executives to coordinate national positions on EU issues, but strengthen prime ministers' offices relative to portfolio ministries.

We explore this hypothesis empirically through a two-fold strategy. First, we provide a case study of the effects of European Council decision-making on chief executive empowerment in one member state, Sweden, drawing on a combination of primary and secondary material. This case was selected because of two methodological advantages. To start with, Sweden joined the EU first in 1995, when decision-making in the European Council was already well institutionalised. This means that potential transformative pressures of summitry on domestic institutional structures should be particularly observable in Sweden, compared with states with longer membership histories, where adaptation is likely to have been more gradual. In addition, Sweden presents a least-likely case for chief executive empowerment, partly because it was ruled from 1995 to 2006 by minority governments, which typically are more constrained than majority governments in relation to parliament, and partly because its executive by tradition operates according to norms of collective cabinet government, with more limited room for independent action by the chief executive than under prime ministerial government. Second, we then proceed to put the Swedish experience in a comparative European perspective, surveying secondary evidence on chief executive empowerment in a broad range of EU member states.

We find extensive support for the hypothesis that EU summitry contributes to domestic institutional changes that empower chief executives

at the expense of legislatures and other actors within the executive. Despite structural political conditions that worked against chief executive empowerment, the office of the Swedish prime minister was continuously strengthened in the decade following EU accession. The reforms involved shifts in authority, discretion and resources in favour of the chief executive, and were explicitly motivated by the perceived institutional prerequisites for influence in the European Council. Even the Swedish parliament, set to lose from these reforms, recognised the functional necessity to limit legislative oversight, for purposes of allowing the chief executive sufficient room for manoeuvre in summit negotiations. Moreover, the comparative evidence from other European countries suggests that the Swedish experience is far from unique. Despite considerable variation in domestic institutional traditions, EU countries have experienced broadly similar changes in executive–legislative relations and intra-executive relations – a development that can be linked to European integration in general and European Council decision-making in particular.

Our argument carries implications for three distinct theoretical approaches in Comparative Politics and International Relations. First, this article speaks to research on chief executive empowerment in European parliamentary democracies. In contrast to accounts that emphasise short-term contingent factors, such as dominant personalities and comfortable parliamentary majorities, we stress the long-term factor of internationalisation, and specify a central mechanism through which this process affects the domestic standing of chief executives. Second, this article suggests that the literature on the interplay between domestic and international politics has overlooked an increasingly important form of interaction between the two levels of political organisation. Third, this article contributes to the growing literature on ‘Europeanisation’ by mapping an additional mechanism through which participation in European-level decision-making feeds back into the organisation of domestic political systems.

The article proceeds in four steps. In the first section, we outline our theoretical argument, specifying why and how institutionalised summitry affects the domestic organisation of executive–legislative relations and intra-executive relations. The second section presents our case study of the effects of European Council decision-making on chief executive empowerment in Sweden. The third section addresses the extent to which the Swedish experience is unique, or shared by other European parliamentary democracies. We conclude the article by expanding on the broader theoretical implications of our argument.

Explaining Chief Executive Empowerment in Europe

While there is broad consensus that chief executives in Europe have become more powerful within domestic political systems, scholars still grapple with the sources of this development. In this section, we first review contingent

and structural explanations advanced in existing research, then present our argument about the effects of summitry on the domestic standing of chief executives, and finally explain why the European Council, given its properties, may have generated such consequences.

Mapping the Field: Contingent and Structural Explanations

The position of chief executives in European political systems has developed into an increasingly prominent theme of research (e.g. Goetz 2006; Peters *et al.* 2000a; Poguntke and Webb 2005a). Contributions to this literature broadly share the assessment that we have witnessed a growing concentration of power around prime ministers and presidents in Europe in recent decades. In this vein, Peters *et al.* (2000b: 7) note that ‘there has been a steady movement towards the reinforcement of the political core executive in most advanced industrial countries and, that within the core executive, there has been increasing centralisation of authority around the person of the chief executive’. Similarly, Webb and Poguntke (2005: 352) conclude, on the basis of a broad set of comparative case studies, that there is ample evidence for a ‘presidentialisation’ of the executive in European parliamentary democracies.

The explanations advanced to account for this phenomenon emphasise a range of contingent and structural factors best conceived of as complementary (Poguntke and Webb 2005b: 13–17). Contingent explanations centre on factors that are claimed to have reinforced the position of chief executives, but are short-term and context-specific in nature. Accounts privileging the *personality of chief executives* suggest that the leadership styles of particular prime ministers and presidents explain their dominance on the domestic political scene (e.g. Foley 2000). This interpretation has frequently been advanced in relation to the influential positions of, for instance, Tony Blair, Silvio Berlusconi, Helmut Kohl and Göran Persson. Explanations favouring the *domestic political context* suggest that the powerful position of certain chief executives can be attributed to the specific majoritarian environment in which they operate (e.g. Blondel and Müller-Rommel 1993; Strøm *et al.* 2003). Notably, chief executives heading one-party majority governments are more likely to dominate domestic politics than chief executives either heading minority governments or relying on multi-party coalition majorities.

Moving beyond contingent factors, structural explanations centre on long-term, deep-seated trends in state, society and politics that are claimed to favour the position of chief executives. Accounts privileging the *internationalisation of politics* emphasise how the governance of globalisation through intergovernmental negotiations shifts power to those actors with exclusive access to these arenas, typically, chief executives, key advisors and other cabinet members (e.g. Moravcsik 1994). By transforming issues that were previously subject to the principles of domestic politics into

foreign policy, internationalisation favours executives at the expense of legislatures. Explanations focusing on the *growth of the state* suggest that the reinforcement of chief executives constitutes a response to demands for coordination from the centre, as the state becomes increasingly complex and fragmented (e.g. Peters *et al.* 2000b). Rather than diffusing authority, expansion of state functions and growing sectoral specialisation strengthen the executive, in this view. Accounts that centre on the *logic of modern mass media* stress the extent to which especially television nurtures a focus on personalities in politics, rather than on programmes and issues (e.g. Street 2001). This development is claimed to benefit chief executives, who become natural foci of media attention and often reinforce this development themselves by cultivating personal images tailored for modern mass media. Finally, explanations privileging the *erosion of traditional social cleavages* emphasise how politics has become increasingly leadership-centred, as social group identities and voter loyalties have weakened (e.g. Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Political parties, as a result, have been transformed from membership organisations into campaign organisations centred around party leaders.

Unpacking Internationalisation: Summitry and Domestic Institutional Change

We share important analytical affinities with accounts that privilege the internationalisation of politics as a source of chief executive empowerment. Yet we are dissatisfied with the existing status of this explanation for two reasons. First, there is a strong tendency in existing research to refer broadly to internationalisation or European integration, without specifying in detail what it is about this process that empowers chief executives at the expense of other domestic actors (cf. Bäck *et al.* 2009; Poguntke and Webb 2005a). Second, where accounts offer such specifications, they centre primarily on the ways in which exclusive access to international negotiation arenas expands the room for manoeuvre of chief executives and allows them to promote specific political agendas (cf. Putnam 1988). Yet, as we shall argue, developing on a claim first made by Andrew Moravcsik (1994), the contribution of internationalisation to chief executive empowerment goes further than that. Most importantly, it extends to long-term changes in domestic institutional relations.

We conceive of the domestic institutional position of the chief executive as defined by two relationships: (a) the balance of power between the executive and the legislature, and (b) the balance of power within the executive, between the prime minister and other cabinet members. We hypothesise that international summitry, when vested with broad decision-making powers, generates functional pressures for the conferral of authority, discretion and resources on chief executives. When acted upon, these pressures translate into domestic institutional change, shifting power (a) away from legislatures and toward executives, and (b) away from portfolio ministers and toward

prime ministers. The combined effect of these shifts is a significant domestic empowerment of chief executives. In order to capture this effect, we adopt a broad definition of institutions as involving formal and informal norms, rules and procedures.

The extent to which summitry generates functional pressures for domestic institutional change, we suggest, is a product of the decision-making powers vested in the summit institution. Where summits are mainly declaratory or just address a narrow set of issues, they give rise to only weak functional pressures and are unlikely to engender domestic institutional change. However, where summits involve authoritative decision-making across a broad range of issues, they are likely to generate substantial and consequential pressures for shifts in power in favour of chief executives.¹ We hypothesise that these effects of summitry on executive–legislative relations and intra-executive relations are translated through three causal mechanisms.

First, international cooperation in general, and summitry in particular, require domestic delegation of *authority* to chief executives. This authority, we suggest, comes in two forms: external and internal. External authority consists of the right of the chief executive to represent the state in international negotiations by presenting national positions, forming coalitions, and entering into agreements. Internal authority consists of the right of the chief executive to define the national interest, by coordinating, aggregating and adjudicating between alternative domestic interests. Both forms of authority are functional prerequisites for participation in summit decision-making, and the conferral of these forms of authority on chief executives represents a shift in the domestic balance of power, since both legislatures and other members of the executive enjoy greater formal power when issues are addressed through traditional domestic procedures, involving parliamentary adoption and oversight, as well as executive initiation and implementation.

The extent of authority conferred on chief executives is likely to be a consequence of the decision scope of the particular summit institution. The broader the decision scope of a summit institution, the broader the set of issues on which chief executives require external and internal authority. By the same token, changes over time in the decision scope of summit institutions should affect the authority delegated to chief executives in predictable ways. If the decision scope expands over time, issues that previously were within the executive domain of portfolio ministers and the legislative domain of national parliaments should be moved into the domain of chief executive representation and coordination.

Second, summit negotiations require that chief executives possess a degree of *discretion* vis-à-vis domestic constituencies. In line with principal–agent theory, we conceive of discretion as the sum of the authority delegated to an actor minus the control mechanisms instituted to oversee the exercise of this authority. The traditional mechanisms of oversight operated by legislatures

in relation to executives in the international realm include *ex ante* specification of negotiation mandates and *ex post* requirements of ratification (Martin 2000). In the case of summit negotiations, chief executives enjoy an amount of discretion, as long as national parliaments do not fully dictate the positions they present, the compromises they strike, and the agreements they adopt at the international level.

For several reasons, legislative oversight vis-à-vis chief executives engaged in summit bargaining is typically less intrusive than oversight of executive action at the national level. Not only can it be difficult for parliaments to monitor the actions of chief executives in international negotiations, and costly for them to sanction chief executives if they submit unpopular agreements for ratification (Moravcsik 1994). In addition, as theories of delegation suggest, national parliaments may have reason to deliberately abstain from intrusive oversight, since complete control would negatively affect the capacity of chief executives to find compromise solutions, even if it may strengthen their negotiation positions (Nicolaidis 1999).

Third, summit decision-making requires chief executives to possess independent *resources*. For purposes of effectively representing the member state in summit negotiations, chief executives need staff that can provide them with information about the preferences of the other parties, the technical subject matter, and the decision-making procedures. Likewise, in order to effectively define the national interest to be pursued through summit negotiations, chief executives require staff that can collect information on domestic preferences, adjudicate between competing factions within the executive, and coordinate government policy.

We would therefore expect international summitry to affect the domestic organisation of the executive, notably, the relative concentration of resources in the prime minister's office relative to the portfolio ministries. As issues are shifted to the summit level and chief executives gain in authority relative to other ministers, coordination responsibilities and resource allocation within the executive are likely to follow suit. As a result, existing differences between member states in the organisation of the executive may become less pronounced. Decentralised executives with only weak government-wide coordinating mechanisms will be under pressure to become more hierarchical, and already centralised executives with strong coordination mechanisms will find increasing reason to sustain these structures.

Summitry in the European Union

If the theoretical logic that we advance correctly captures the conditions under which summitry may empower chief executives domestically, we would expect such effects to be particularly prominent in the member states of the EU. The European Council has developed into the foremost example of an international summit institution with wide-reaching decision

prerogatives. While summit bodies are a frequent feature of other international organisations as well, such as the G8, ASEAN and NATO, none is comparable to the European Council in terms of decision scope and institutionalisation.

The European Council today constitutes the supreme political body of the EU. It is formally composed of the heads of state and government of the member states and the president of the European Commission, assisted by the ministers of foreign affairs and another member of the Commission. It is distinct from the Council of Ministers, which brings together government ministers in specialised Council configurations and engages in legislative negotiations on EU legislation. The European Council meets at least four times a year and these summits 'mark the rhythm of the Union's various activities in the way religious feast days marked the rhythm of daily life in medieval Christendom' (de Schoutheete 2006: 57). By taking decisions, adopting guidelines, reviewing progress and calling for new policy initiatives, the European Council structures the work of the EU's institutional machinery. Moreover, its meetings generate intense bilateral and multilateral contacts between the chief executives and their offices in between summits, when positions are prepared, coalitions are formed and pre-negotiations are conducted.

A central feature of the historical development of the European Council is the constant expansion of its decision scope. While originally founded in 1974 to provide a forum for informal exchanges between chief executives on the EU's future development, the European Council has evolved into an integral part of the organisation's decision-making machinery (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006; Werts 2008; Westlake and Galloway 2004). Next to providing strategic orientation, the European Council nowadays serves as ultimate decision-maker on issues too complex or contentious for the Council of Ministers to handle, shapes the EU's collective foreign policy, coordinates member state policy on socioeconomic issues, appoints senior officials of the EU institutions, initiates and concludes constitutional conferences that amend the treaties, and effectively decides if, when, and how the EU should welcome new members.

The expansion of the decision remit of the European Council has mainly taken place through changes in informal practices, even if there are rare instances of changes to its formal competences as well. In the field of foreign policy, for instance, the role of the European Council was strengthened through the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, in which it was delegated the authority to define general principles and guidelines for EU foreign policy, as well as to adopt long-term policy strategies. Similarly, in socioeconomic policy, the European Council's decision authority was expanded through the introduction of a new coordination method for employment policy in 1997, and the subsequent expansion of this method in 2000 to a broader range of policy areas. Most importantly, however, informal practices grant the European Council a central role in potentially all areas of EU policy. As two close

observers emphasise: 'Operating . . . in the absence of a clearly defined role or explicitly delimited functions, the European Council has felt free to deal with whatever issue it likes in whatever way it likes. As a result, the heads of state or government have been, and continue to be, involved directly in all the important issues on the EU's agenda' (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006: 170). Notably, issues referred from the Council of Ministers nowadays constitute an important part of the European Council's agenda. Whereas the specialised Councils enjoy formal decision-making authority within their respective policy fields, stretching from environment and social affairs to agriculture and regional aid, the European Council is frequently called upon to take decisions even in these areas. This may happen because the specialised Councils have been unable to reach compromises themselves, or because issues cut across several Council configurations and require a package agreement, or because the issues are of such a political magnitude that the decisions must be taken by the highest level of authority.

We now proceed to test the core hypothesis that summitry in the EU has contributed to domestic institutional change in its member states, by shifting authority, discretion and resources in favour of chief executives. We find support for our hypothesis where the evidence testifies to: institutional limits in the parliamentary scrutiny of prime ministers in EU affairs, in recognition of the need for chief executive discretion in European Council negotiations; instances of prime ministerial autonomy in relation to parliament on European Council issues where the executive and the legislature hold competing positions; long-term shifts in resources in favour of the chief executive at the expense of portfolio ministers, partly or entirely motivated by European Council decision-making; and examples of chief executives exploiting their privileged authority to determine the national interest on all issues addressed in the European Council, even where this puts them in conflict with portfolio ministers. We begin with a case study of the Swedish experience, and then turn to an analysis of observable patterns in a broader set of European countries.

Case Study: Chief Executive Empowerment in Sweden

A prominent development in Swedish politics over the past decade and a half is the empowerment of the chief executive (e.g. Arter 2006: ch.7; Aylott 2005; Ruin 2007). In this section, we demonstrate that the Swedish government's integration into EU decision-making in general, and the prime minister's participation in the European Council in particular, have contributed to this development. The case study summarises existing secondary evidence and presents new primary evidence drawn from official documents, archival material, memoirs and over 30 interviews with high-level officials and politicians, among them several former prime ministers and ministers of foreign affairs as well as other portfolio ministers.

Executive–Legislative Relations

When Sweden acceded to the EU in 1995, the central question confronting the Swedish parliament, the *Riksdag*, pertained to its instruments for influence and control vis-à-vis the government on EU matters. As opposed to traditional domestic law-making, where the parliament's close involvement and support is required for legislation to be passed, EU decision-making only provides for national representation via the government. While the executive is thus automatically delegated extensive authority as a product of EU membership, the function of the parliament is limited to one of control over the executive. The main institutional mechanism created to ensure such control by the *Riksdag* was the Committee on EU Affairs. The task of the committee is to monitor proposed legislation coming out of Brussels and to examine the positions adopted by the Swedish government in the Council of Ministers and the European Council. Prior to all EU meetings, ministers must first receive support in the Committee on EU Affairs for the positions they intend to pursue, and are then expected to observe these positions. Should they fail to do so, the government risks formal criticism from the *Riksdag* and ultimately a vote of no confidence in the chamber.

Yet, despite the fact that the Swedish EU committee is considered one of the strongest in Europe, its actual powers are quite limited and the discretion of the executive relatively extensive. Most notably, it cannot impose binding mandates on the executive. Rather, its hearings with the government are best regarded as consultations and its positions as strong advice. Whereas the option of a binding mandate was part of the institutional menu in the discussions preceding the establishment of the committee, it was decided that it should not be able to commit a minister to a certain position. In fact, the Swedish parliament itself, through the Committee on the Constitution, 'opposed such a practice, since the government represented Sweden in the Council, and it was considered important that the government could act with full political responsibility' (Jungar and Ahlbäck Öberg 2004: 189–90). There was broad parliamentary support for this constitutional arrangement, designed to allow the government a measure of discretion in EU-level negotiations. The result was to make the committee less of an effective control mechanism and more of a legitimisation instrument, permitting the Swedish government to negotiate with the formal support of the parliament.

Two significant institutional changes have taken place since the Committee on EU Affairs was first set up. Both have sought to strengthen the parliament's involvement in EU matters, but neither has entailed a step away from the approach of balancing parliamentary control and executive discretion.

First, and most significantly, the authority of the Committee on EU Affairs to scrutinise the government's actions in the Council of Ministers has

been supplemented with a corresponding right in relation to the prime minister's participation in the European Council. As a political rather than legislative body, the European Council was not covered in the original arrangement for parliamentary scrutiny, designed in 1994, prior to the accession. Nor did the architects of this system anticipate the strengthening of the European Council during the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s, when it was granted additional authority over foreign policy and socioeconomic policy. However, once the Swedish parliament experienced EU cooperation first hand, it became clear that parliamentary scrutiny, in order to be meaningful, had to be extended to government actions in the European Council. Since January 2007, it is stipulated in the *Riksdag* Act that the government shall consult with the committee before meetings of the European Council. It is not formally stipulated that the prime minister should report back to the committee after European Council meetings, but this has been standard practice since the early 2000s.

Second, in response to dissatisfaction with the existing system of parliamentary scrutiny, a set of reforms was proposed in 2006. The proposals targeted concerns that the *Riksdag* receives information about new EU legislation too late for the parliament to be able to exert actual influence, and that parliamentary activity on European issues is concentrated to the Committee on EU Affairs. The reforms subsequently introduced were designed to 'mainstream' EU affairs, by involving the specialised committees of the parliament to a greater extent and at an earlier stage in the handling of EU issues. It is notable that this revision of the system of parliamentary scrutiny did not address as a problem the absence of binding mandates on the government in EU negotiations.

Moving from institutional design to political practice, the track record of the Committee on EU Affairs shows that the parliament has been reluctant to tie the hands of the government in EU negotiations, whether these pertain to everyday legislative activity or European Council negotiations. Despite its potential for influence, there are limitations to what the parliament can achieve in terms of control, given the wish to grant the executive sufficient discretion. In the words of Aylott (2007: 180), 'there is the appreciation that, as in foreign policy, the Swedish position in multilateral negotiations can be weakened if a minister is mandated too tightly. ... This constraint is perhaps most visible before important meetings of the European Council; even Eurosceptical parties are reluctant to be seen to damage national interests by limiting the government's room to bargain'.

Evidence on the operation of the Committee on EU Affairs indicates that its influence is limited in relation to the executive. The cases in which the parliament has not endorsed the proposed position of the government are extremely few, and the committee has generally refrained from tough criticism of ministers. While, in theory, it could be that the government rationally anticipates the reactions of the committee and tailors its proposals to ensure support, multiple forms of evidence suggest otherwise.

Survey evidence reported by Raunio and Wiberg (2000: 346) suggests that the parliament's influence on EU policies is 'rather limited and almost entirely *post factum* in character'. The weakness of the *Riksdag* was seen as exacerbated by the strong position of the executive and the lack of constructive interest in EU matters on the part of members of parliament. Similarly, an elite survey with members of the Swedish parliament in 2001–02 showed that the parliamentarians themselves conceive of the government as the dominant actor in EU affairs (Jungar and Ahlbäck Öberg 2004: 179–80). Finally, interviews provide evidence of members of parliament complaining about the government's control of information and the fact that ministers first present an issue to the Committee on EU Affairs when it appears on the agenda of the Council, following months and often years of preparatory negotiations (Aylott 2007: 180).

The ultimate weapon of the parliament, short of a vote of no confidence, is to formally examine the government's actions in the Committee on the Constitution. In a few cases, such examinations have been initiated for purposes of assessing whether the chief executive fulfilled its obligation to consult the parliament on national positions in advance of European Council meetings. These cases illustrate the limits of parliamentary scrutiny and the extensive scope of government discretion, not least in the European Council.

One case where proper consultation with the Committee on EU Affairs did not take place in advance was the controversial issue of whether the EU should lift its arms embargo against China (Swedish *Riksdag* 2004/05). The issue was brought up spontaneously by the French president at a meeting of the European Council in December 2003 and, again, at a summit a year later. Whereas the Swedish prime minister was taken by surprise and opposed on the first occasion, he did not use the national veto when the issue was brought up again in December 2004. On neither occasion was the Swedish position presented to the Committee on EU Affairs for approval. The prime minister repeatedly explained his decision not to consult the committee on this and other occasions with the habit of the chief executives to move beyond their prepared agenda and take political actions at their own initiative: 'It happens at almost every summit that something comes up that you did not anticipate' (Swedish *Riksdag* 2004/05).

A second case, and the prime example so far of an explicit clash between the executive and the parliament on the conduct of EU policy, concerned the proposal for a European Council president. In preparatory negotiations for a new EU treaty in 2002, the Swedish government presented a 'non-paper', suggesting that the rotating presidency of the European Council be replaced by a semi-permanent president. The Committee on EU Affairs had not been consulted on the controversial contents of this non-paper, which was opposed by a majority in the parliament. The Committee on the Constitution formally criticised the government on the grounds that the Swedish proposal had been launched without prior consultation with

the Committee on EU Affairs (Swedish Riksdag 2002/03). The proposal became the subject of parliamentary scrutiny in the following year as well, when the prime minister was called to a hearing before the Committee on the Constitution (Swedish Riksdag 2003/04). Yet, over the subsequent course of the negotiations on the new treaty, the prime minister continued to communicate his support for the proposal in conversations with other heads of government. While mentioning the lack of parliamentary support for the proposal, he confirmed his great personal commitment to this issue and offered the assessment that an eventual Swedish veto was unlikely, since it would entail rejecting the entire treaty. This assessment turned out to be correct. In the end, a majority in the parliament endorsed the new treaty, including the provisions for a European Council president.

The Swedish prime minister from 1996 to 2006, Göran Persson, expressed great satisfaction with the existing system of parliamentary scrutiny, testifying that the Committee on EU Affairs caused his government 'extremely few troubles' (G. Persson 2007: 236). Persson's state secretary and EU advisor observes that the prime minister's appearances in parliament before and after EU summits often had the character of 'one-man shows' (Danielsson 2007: 109). The fact that Persson's social democratic government was in a parliamentary minority during this period, and had to secure support for its proposals through negotiations with other parties, did not prevent EU policy from being exceedingly government driven.

Political developments after 2006, when the social democratic minority government was replaced by a centre-right coalition majority, strongly suggest that the shift in executive-legislative relations is permanent, rather than conditional on specific political circumstances or personalities. There has been no attempt from the parliament to impose tighter constraints on the prime minister's actions in the European Council, or on EU-related actions of government ministers in general. Moreover, it is indicative of the broad agreement on the necessity for the executive to enjoy significant leeway in EU affairs that the cross-partisan Working Committee on Constitutional Reform, with the task of conducting a full-scale review of Sweden's constitutional system, did not recommend any changes to the system of parliamentary scrutiny in EU affairs in its recent report (Grundlagsutredningen 2008).

In conclusion, EU decision-making has weakened the ability of the Swedish parliament to control the executive in general, and the prime minister in particular. Decision-making at the EU level excludes the parliament from direct participation, and its mechanisms for controlling the executive are purposefully designed to allow the government and the prime minister certain leeway in EU negotiations. Several reforms have been initiated to strengthen the involvement of the parliament in EU policy-making, but none has sought to challenge the balance between parliamentary scrutiny and executive discretion.

Intra-executive Relations

As a principle, the Swedish government takes decisions as a collegial body. All major decisions are preceded by interministerial coordination, and the cabinet is collectively responsible for the decisions it adopts. During the preparations for EU accession, it was established that the principle of collective decision-making should apply to EU matters as well. However, Sweden's membership in the EU has contributed to a gradual weakening of this principle and a corresponding strengthening of the prime minister, both in terms of coordination authority and resources (cf. Larsson and Trondal 2005: 22). Whereas the portfolio ministers are responsible for their respective policy areas in the Council of Ministers, overall responsibility for Sweden's EU policy rests with the prime minister. Moreover, issues of high political salience tend to drift to the prime minister and his office. Finally, only the prime minister has the authority to solve interministerial conflicts and forge a common line.

The decline of collective cabinet government pertains to all policy fields, but has been particularly prominent in foreign policy, where the chief executive has come to assume a broader operative role, according to interviewees. To a large extent, this follows from the fact that the European Council over the course of time has become increasingly involved in foreign policy, with the ministers of foreign affairs forced to take a secondary position. As a former state secretary for foreign and EU affairs explains:

The heads of government have become more and more involved in foreign policy and almost taken over the important decisions on EU policy. The reason for this development is the EU in general and the EU summits – the European Council – in particular. When the leaders of the EU now meet at least four times a year to take decisions on both general questions and important parts of the common foreign and security policy, they, of course, also want to be involved in the discussions on important issues between the summits. (Danielsson 2007: 153–4)

Former foreign minister and deputy prime minister Lena Hjelm-Wallén cites as an additional reason that issues frequently are initiated directly in European Council without having been processed previously in the EU or the member states, requiring the prime minister to determine the Swedish position on matters that normally would fall under the authority of the portfolio ministers (interview, 28 October 2004). Hans Dahlgren, former state secretary in the ministry of foreign affairs, with experience of working for three Swedish prime ministers, summarises: 'It is a dramatic development – If you think of who really handles foreign policy, then it is clear that a displacement has taken place so that the prime minister and his

collaborators do an important part, over and above what the foreign minister and the ministry of foreign affairs do' (interview, 25 October 2005). The same conclusion is advanced by Gunnar Lund, former deputy minister of finance and permanent representative to the EU, who emphasises that the prime minister's office has 'won increased influence over foreign policy and external relations overall' (interview, 8 June 2005).

Yet the concentration of power to the prime minister is not exclusive to the field of foreign policy. Illustrative examples of how the chief executive through its participation in the European Council can take decisions on issues normally within the authority of portfolio ministers, and even adopt positions contrary to those of the portfolio ministers, can be found in the area of economic affairs. In 1999, finance minister Erik Åsbrink felt compelled to resign after clashes the previous year with the prime minister over Swedish macroeconomic policy in the EU context and the Swedish position on the regulation of tax-free sales in the EU. On both dossiers, the finance minister was overruled by the prime minister, who intervened to set the Swedish position. On the issue of tax-free sales, the finance minister had taken the position, conforming with a previous decision by the Ecofin Council, that tax-free sales for intra-Community travellers should be abolished. However, when the issue was brought up anew in the European Council during 1998, on the initiative of the prime ministers of France, Germany and the UK, who feared employment losses, Prime Minister Göran Persson chose to side with his European colleagues, much to the dismay of his finance minister (Danielsson 2007: 103; Fichtelius 2007: 79; G. Persson 2007: 220). While less dramatic, it is equally illustrative that the Swedish chief negotiator of the EU's long-term budget (financial perspective) in 2005 was not the finance minister, but the prime minister's state secretary.

The concentration of power in the prime minister's office has taken place through gradual shifts in authority and resources since the mid-1990s, in the shape of organisational reforms of the government offices. While, historically, the organisation of the government offices has been governed by the principle that the prime minister's office should be slim and not develop into a ministry of its own, these reforms have brought about a surrender of that model (T. Persson 2007: 222).

The system for managing the coordination of EU affairs was one component of the preparations for membership prior to 1995. While one option was to centralise the coordinating machinery in the office of the prime minister, it was eventually decided that the unit for EU coordination should be located in the ministry of foreign affairs instead. The prime minister at the time, Ingvar Carlsson, was against incorporating EU coordination in his office (interview, 29 August 2005). Yet, recognising that European Council meetings would have to be prepared, the prime minister established a foreign affairs division in his office, capable of supplying independent advice and support (interview, 19 June 2006).

A decade-long process toward full control by the prime minister's office of EU coordination began in 1996, one year after accession. The central steps in this process are summarised in Table 1. When taking office, Göran Persson explicitly stated that the responsibility for coordinating EU matters should rest with his office (Miles 2005: 69; Ruin 2000: 59). As a first step, he abolished the previous position of EU minister in the ministry of foreign affairs. An additional major step was taken in January 1997, when all ministries were merged into one organisational entity, the government offices, with the prime minister as head. The reform enhanced the role of the prime minister's office in policy coordination, at the expense of the portfolio ministries, including the traditionally powerful finance and foreign ministries (Elder and Page 2000: 149). The change was motivated by the challenges of EU membership, according to the working group preparing the reform (Prime Minister's Office 1996). In particular, there was a perceived need for the prime minister's office to have a clearer responsibility for the setting of EU policy priorities, especially in view of constitutional conferences and meetings of the European Council. However, the working group simultaneously concluded that the secretariat for EU affairs in the foreign ministry would not necessarily have to be placed within the prime minister's office, which already had the responsibility for solving conflicts between individual ministries on EU matters.

In 1997, a new working group was set up to examine how EU coordination could be improved (Prime Minister's Office 1997). According to its report, a particular flaw in the existing system was weak political steering. Special emphasis was placed on the meetings of the European Council and the need to better prepare the prime minister for these meetings. The report spelled out as an alternative to the existing

TABLE 1
MAJOR ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES IN THE SYSTEM OF EU COORDINATION
IN SWEDEN

Year	Changes
1994	A separate minister of EU affairs in the ministry of foreign affairs. Day-to-day policy coordination by an EU secretariat in the ministry of foreign affairs.
1996	The position of minister of EU affairs in the ministry of foreign affairs abolished. Overall responsibility for EU coordination placed in the prime minister's office. Day-to-day coordination remains in the ministry of foreign affairs.
1999	The position of state secretary of EU affairs in the ministry of foreign affairs transferred to the prime minister's office and put in charge of a new EU department. Day-to-day coordination remains in the ministry of foreign affairs.
2004	Overall responsibility for EU policy coordination placed with deputy prime minister in the prime minister's office.
2005	Day-to-day coordination shifted from the ministry of foreign affairs to a new EU coordination secretariat in the prime minister's office.
2006	A minister of EU affairs established in the prime minister's office.

Source: Adapted and extended from T. Persson (2007: 209).

organisation that EU coordination could be located in the prime minister's office under the supervision of a special state secretary for EU affairs. Not surprisingly, the proposal met with strong opposition from the ministry of foreign affairs.

This opposition notwithstanding, the chief executive in 1999 proceeded to reorganise the machinery for EU coordination. The position of state secretary for EU affairs in the ministry of foreign affairs was abolished, and instead the EU and foreign affairs advisor to the prime minister was appointed state secretary for EU affairs. The aim of this reorganisation was to concentrate the overall coordination responsibilities within the prime minister's office (Ruin 2000: 60). This was perceived as particularly important in view of the impending Swedish presidency of the EU in 2001. After the 1999 reform, Sweden was categorised in the group of 'comprehensive centralizers' as regards the domestic coordination of EU policy, along with France, the UK, and Denmark (Kassim 2003: 92, 94; see also Miles 2005: 74).

The new state secretary for EU affairs quickly became very influential within the government. Acting on the direct mandate of the prime minister, he created a form of unitary command and control structure for EU policy of particular political salience (Johansson 2008). He organised the prime minister's support structure, provided advice on EU matters, formulated Swedish negotiating positions, intervened in instructions given by portfolio ministries, and sought to ensure consistency and coherence in Swedish EU policy. The state secretary functioned as EU minister in everything but name, and sometimes even as foreign minister. Indeed, at European Council summits, the prime minister frequently sent away the foreign minister unless the EU's external relations were on the agenda, and instead asked the state secretary to take the seat next to him (Danielsson 2007: 109).

In 2003, the prime minister's office conducted yet another review of the system for EU coordination (Prime Minister's Office 2003). The review resulted in a proposal to establish a secretariat for EU affairs in the prime minister's office, and also put forward the option of moving responsibility for the Swedish EU representation in Brussels from the ministry of foreign affairs to the prime minister's office. The report sought legitimacy for such reforms through references to the systems for EU coordination in Britain, France and Finland, where this authority was located in the prime minister's office (Johansson and Raunio 2009). Moreover, the report explicitly emphasised the increasingly important role of the European Council and argued that this provided a further reason for EU coordination to be brought under the authority of the prime minister's office.

Eventually, in September 2004, the prime minister announced that the responsibility for EU coordination would be fully shifted from the ministry of foreign affairs to the prime minister's office. Whereas the previous foreign minister, Anna Lindh, had been able to block this reform for a number of years, Laila Freivalds, who had assumed office in 2003, found herself

presented by a *fait accompli*. In late 2004, Persson made his deputy, based in the prime minister's office, responsible in the cabinet for the policy coordination of all horizontal EU issues apart from enlargement. In April 2005, this reform was completed through the establishment in the prime minister's office of a new EU coordination secretariat, which today consists of over 30 people. This transfer of full responsibility for EU policy coordination to the prime minister's office constituted a major organisational reform of the central government machinery.

A very concrete expression of this decade-long process of change is the significant expansion in the staff of the prime minister's office over this period of time (Government Offices of Sweden 2009). When Sweden joined the EU in 1995, the prime minister's office could still be described as quite slim, with a staff of 49. Over the following 12 years, the number of staff increased by 170 per cent, to 132 at the end of 2007 (prior to the mobilisation for the Swedish presidency of the EU, which brought about a further increase to 177 at the end of 2008). This should be compared to the ministry of foreign affairs, which has seen a drop in the number of staff over the same period. The move of the EU coordination secretariat from the ministry of foreign affairs to the prime minister's office in 2005 is a contributing reason for this pattern.

When taking office in October 2006, the new centre-right government chose to retain this structure for EU policy coordination, privileging the chief executive at the expense of portfolio ministers. In fact, the new government brought this shift yet one step further, by creating a position of minister of EU affairs, based in the prime minister's office, with responsibility for horizontal EU issues, such as treaty reform, the EU's long-term budget, and Sweden's chairmanship of the EU in autumn 2009. This pattern strongly underlines the structural rather than conditional nature of the empowerment of the Swedish chief executive.

In conclusion, the history of Swedish intra-executive relations since 1995 is one of gradual reinforcement of the chief executive at the expense of other ministers. The principal driving factor in this process has been the demands of EU decision-making – not least EU summitry – on national policy coordination. Step by step, authority and resources have been shifted to the prime minister's office, which has taken command over Swedish EU policy. Despite traditions and norms prescribing a small prime minister's office and collective decision-making in the cabinet, power has been centralised with the chief executive.

The General Record: Chief Executive Empowerment in Europe

Is the Swedish experience of chief executive empowerment unique, or the product of a general trend in the organisation of European parliamentary democracies? To address this question, this section offers an inventory of secondary evidence on chief executive empowerment in a range of EU

countries. We conclude that EU states, despite considerable variation in domestic institutional traditions, have experienced very similar changes in executive–legislative relations and intra-executive relations, which can be linked to European integration in general and European Council decision-making in particular.

Executive–Legislative Relations

There is almost universal agreement in existing empirical studies that national executives have strengthened their position at the expense of legislatures over the past decades, as a product of European integration (e.g. Börzel and Risse 2006; Kassim 2005; Kassim *et al.* 2000; Maurer and Wessels 2001). Issues that parliaments traditionally have decided have increasingly shifted to the EU institutions, thus expanding the authority of national executives, which enjoy privileged access to this arena. In addition, national parliaments experience greater difficulties in controlling executives on EU matters than on domestic policy, granting national executives significant discretion.

The primary instrument whereby national legislatures in Europe have sought to influence and monitor executives is specialised EU committees. The standard tasks of these committees are to monitor proposed legislation coming out of Brussels and to examine the positions taken by the ministers of the executive in the Council and the European Council. Through these arrangements, national parliaments acquire a stronger role than they would on traditional foreign policy matters, but a weaker role than on domestic policy issues, leading some observers to claim the emergence of a new kind of parliamentary system for EU matters (Hegeland 2007; Martin 2000).

In a broad comparative perspective, two patterns are particularly notable. First, almost everywhere, national legislatures have since the early 1990s made concerted efforts to regain some control vis-à-vis executives. Summarising 15 country studies, Mittag and Wessels (2003: 432) conclude that, ‘in nearly all Member States, national parliaments have strengthened their formal role in the EU decision-making process. Though decision-making continues to be primarily in the hands of governments, their room for manoeuvre in Brussels negotiations will be restricted to an increasing extent by national parliaments and particularly by their specialised committees’. This assessment is shared by a range of other studies, which testify to attempts by parliaments to become more involved, but continuing difficulties in holding executives accountable to the same extent as in domestic politics (e.g. Raunio and Hix 2000; Kassim 2005; O’Brennan and Raunio 2007).

The second pattern is continuing differences between national legislatures in their involvement in EU issues. Whereas all parliaments have sought to improve their position in relation to executives, comparisons show that the Nordic legislatures are the most engaged in EU decision-making (Maurer

and Wessels 2001; O'Brennan and Raunio 2007). In contrast to the parliaments in, for instance, Greece and Portugal, which only operate weak EU committees, the legislatures of the Nordic countries are equipped with relatively extensive control powers. The Danish and Finnish parliaments possess similar mechanisms for monitoring the chief executive in the European Council as the Swedish parliament does nowadays (Raunio and Wiberg 2000: 348–9). In Denmark, the prime minister must inform the European Committee of issues likely to be on the agenda of the meeting, and if the government expects important decisions to be taken, it must obtain a mandate from the committee. In Finland, the prime minister is obliged to inform the Grand Committee of questions to be addressed in the European Council, and he or she is also required to provide information afterwards on the actual deliberations. However, in neither case has the effectiveness of the system for controlling the executive been deemed satisfactory, generating investigations into how it may be tightened further (Hegeland 2007).

The underlying problem, according to a recent analysis, is that 'even the most powerful committee cannot fully neutralise the essential logic of politics: in order to be capable of reaching a compromise, politicians who participate in higher-level decision-making arenas need to have some freedom for manoeuvre. Parliamentary committees (and party bodies) may attempt to constrain this freedom, but they cannot apply strict control unless they want to obstruct the very decision making that they are trying to monitor and control' (Poguntke *et al.* 2007: 764). Cross-national data on the perceived autonomy of government elites from the national parties they represent confirm that ministers enjoy extensive discretion on EU issues, and even suggest that this discretion may have increased over time. Moreover, within the executive, the prime ministers in the European Council are generally seen as possessing higher levels of discretion than the portfolio ministers in the Council of Ministers (Carter and Poguntke 2007).

In sum, empirical analyses suggest that European integration has altered the relationship between executives and legislatures in favour of the former. EU decision-making has provided executives with a political arena beyond close parliamentary scrutiny. While national parliaments have taken steps to reassert control, through the establishment and strengthening of EU committees, these mechanisms still leave executives with substantial discretion.

Intra-executive Relations

Empirical evidence from a broad set of European states suggests a general decline in collective cabinet government in Europe, with chief executives playing a more independent role in EU matters. A comparative study of domestic institutional change in all 15 member states prior to the 2004

enlargement finds that chief executives, without exception, have gained in relative power due to EU summitry:

Particularly through their role as members of the European Council they are able to steer internal procedures and thus to lead the national decision-making process. The European Council and bilateral summits have even reinforced the role of those heads of government that were less powerful in the national arena. Given the need to act assertively and coherently in making key decisions, which are increasingly taken through the European Council, prime ministers have gained power *vis-à-vis* their colleagues. (Mittag and Wessels 2003: 423)

The same pattern of chief executive empowerment is reported in additional case studies of intra-executive developments in Germany, Ireland, Finland, the UK, and the Netherlands, as well as in preliminary assessments of the impact of the EU on the Central and East European states that joined the organisation in 2004 (Allen 2005; Andeweg and Irwin 2005; Bulmer *et al.* 2000; Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007; Fink-Hafner 2007; Harmsen 1999; Johansson and Raunio 2009; Laffan 2007; Laffan and O'Mahoney 2007).

A central component of this power shift is the authority conferred on chief executives for coordinating national positions – most obviously on those issues addressed by the European Council, but also on those EU issues that stretch across multiple functional domains or involve conflict within the executive. Whereas the specific procedures for adjudicating issues and fixing negotiating positions vary between member countries, national coordination systems have in common an increasingly deep involvement of chief executives (Kassim 2005; Kassim *et al.* 2000).

A knock-on effect of the growing authority of chief executives in coordination is a shift in resources toward the offices of the prime ministers, regardless of whether they are structurally weak or strong by tradition and constitutional design. As Kassim (2003: 85) reports: 'The European Council's increasingly high profile and the broadening of its agenda ... require that Heads of State and Government have at their disposal the institutional resources necessary for effective participation.' Domestic coordination of EU policy demands considerable resources, as does the preparation and pre-negotiation of issues to be addressed in the European Council.

Two forms of recurring events have contributed to the growing resources of prime ministers' offices. Constitutional conferences convened to revise the EU treaties have taken place at regular intervals since the mid-1980s, and then constituted central themes on the agenda of the European Council. Since these conferences pertain to institutional questions that cut across traditional policy domains, the authority to prepare national positions has tended to be placed in the offices of the prime ministers (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 2006: 233). In addition, the rotating responsibility of chairing

all meetings in the Council and the European Council has contributed to boosting the resources of chief executive offices. Holding the presidency is a highly resource-consuming undertaking, and a significant part of the burden is often placed on the chief executives and their offices, for purposes of ensuring a coherent national approach (Tallberg 2006).

Whereas the empowerment of chief executives has taken place at the expense of portfolio ministers in general, ministers of foreign affairs have been particularly disadvantaged by this development. As the topics on the EU agenda pertain increasingly to traditional domestic political issues, it has become inefficient and anachronistic to have ministries of foreign affairs coordinate EU policy. A further indication is the frequent replacement of the foreign ministers at European Council meetings with other portfolio ministers, notably ministers of finance.

The evolution of intra-executive relations in the UK and Finland since the mid-1990s shows how two countries that differ considerably from each other in domestic constitutional and political conditions have undergone a similar process of chief executive empowerment.

Whereas the office of the UK prime minister traditionally is regarded as strong by international comparison, it is first during the past decade that the coordination of EU policy has become centralised to this office. From 2000 onwards, the European Secretariat of the Cabinet Office was substantially strengthened in terms of both personnel and status. This development partly reflected the commitment of Tony Blair as prime minister to a more coherent British EU policy, and partly the institutional logic of regular European Council meetings (Allen 2005; Bulmer and Burch 2005; Wall 2008). As Stephen Wall, former head of the European Secretariat and EU advisor to Blair, explains:

If you meet fairly regularly and you have to take decisive decisions, you want the mechanisms, and once you are down that road, power does not devolve downwards again. By mechanisms I mean authority and personnel in the Cabinet Office, in the UK case. When David Williamson was head of the Cabinet Office in the 1980s, he did not have an independent EU secretariat, but relied on the Foreign Office. The contrast with the 2000s and my own situation is striking. Blair has established a European policy framework that gives him a source of independent advice and execution. (Interview, 30 November 2006; see also Wall 2008: ch. 9)

Even in Finland, with its semi-presidential system and dual executive, European integration has contributed to empowering the prime minister. Accession to the EU in 1995 prompted a constitutional reform in Finland, which involved transferring the responsibility for EU policy to the government from the president, who had previously enjoyed exclusive authority on foreign policy. The driving concern was the 'poor fit between a

president-led system and the demands of EU membership' (Johansson and Raunio 2009: 10). Moreover, within the government, the authority and resources to define and coordinate Finnish EU policy over time have become concentrated in the prime minister's office. Whereas the ministry of foreign affairs had initially been given the overall responsibility for handling European matters, its EU secretariat was transferred to the prime minister's office in 2000, for purposes of ensuring a more efficient coordination of EU issues. This move also served to reinforce the support for the prime minister in relation to European Council meetings. As Raunio and Tiilikainen (2003: 146) conclude: '[T]he political dynamic of the EU policy process has contributed to the prime minister emerging as the undisputed leader in both domestic and [European] integration policy.'

In conclusion, empirical evidence on the development of intra-executive relations in EU countries paints a relatively homogenous picture. As the European Council has become a more prominent decision-making arena in the EU, chief executives and their offices have gained in both coordinating responsibilities and resources. While this shift in power to prime ministers has taken place at the expense of all other cabinet members, foreign ministers have been particularly disadvantaged.

Conclusion

This article suggests that an important contributing factor to the empowerment of chief executives in Europe is the institutionalisation of summit decision-making in the EU over the past 30 years. Adapting to the emergence of the European Council as the authoritative decision-making body on most vital issues of cooperation, EU states have refashioned domestic procedures and practices to provide chief executives with effective negotiation machineries. This has involved the conferral of additional authority, discretion and resources on chief executives, with implications for the balance of power between the executive and the legislature, as well as within the executive branch itself. We have traced this dynamic at work through an in-depth account of domestic institutional change in Sweden, and demonstrated the broader applicability of these findings through an inventory of evidence from other European states.

Our argument should not be misunderstood as an unconditional claim about the effects of international summitry on the domestic empowerment of chief executives. Rather, our argument is subject to three important caveats. First, it is only where summit institutions are endowed with broad decision-making prerogatives that we would expect them to generate pressures for the domestic conferral of authority, discretion and resources on chief executives. In a comparative perspective, the European Council is positioned at one end of the spectrum of international summit institutions. Second, the transformative pressure of summitry on the standing of chief executives is likely to be mediated by pre-existing domestic institutional and

political conditions. While the independent effect of the European Council has been to strengthen chief executives in general, this has not occurred in a uniform way, nor have chief executives become equally powerful as a result. Third, it should be made clear that we by no means argue that a centralisation of power with chief executives is the only effect of European integration on national administrations. We recognise that integration may simultaneously engender processes of decentralisation and diffusion, as ministries, agencies, and sub-national regions engage in direct contact with Brussels (e.g. Jacobsson *et al.* 2004; Læg Reid *et al.* 2004; Larsson and Trondal 2005).

Moreover, our empirical argument comes with two methodological reservations. First, while we have sought to unpack internationalisation and demonstrate the causal role of institutionalised summitry, the embeddedness of this factor within the broader process of European integration simultaneously prevents any easy isolation of its independent effect. Unable to fully eliminate this problem, we have sought to minimise it by isolating evidence that directly ties domestic institutional changes to the European Council, and by acknowledging the extent to which summitry is a core component, albeit only one, within EU decision-making as a force of change. Second, informed by the ambition to demonstrate the contribution of EU summitry to chief executive empowerment in Europe, we have in this article prioritised the theoretical and empirical mapping of the mechanisms through which this takes place, rather than a full-scale assessment of alternative explanations. That said, we have taken a number of measures to reduce the likelihood of omitted variable bias. Notably, we have demonstrated that the shifts in executive–legislative and intra-executive relations in Sweden extend beyond Göran Persson’s social democratic minority government during the first decade of EU membership, to Fredrik Reinfeldt’s centre-right coalition majority government since 2006, thus controlling for the potential contingent impact of leadership personality and domestic political context. Moreover, we have shown that the European Council and EU decision-making in general has caused similar domestic institutional effects in other member states, with variation across leadership personalities and domestic political conditions, including constitutional systems.

Our results carry implications for three fields of research in Comparative Politics and International Relations. First, in isolating EU summitry as a core component of internationalisation, our account substantiates a structural cause of chief executive empowerment or ‘presidentialisation’ in European parliamentary democracies. Our findings challenge those who suggest that the sources are primarily contingent rather than structural in nature. While the effects of personalities and majoritarian relations vary over time, there are structural changes that explain the long-term trend of a concentration of power around chief executives. Moreover, our findings suggest a need to unpack the broader processes of internationalisation and

European integration. While alluring concepts, they complicate the analysis of chief executive empowerment by lumping together a range of economic and political developments that are best kept apart for purposes of explanatory precision.

Second, this article suggests that the literature on the interplay between domestic and international politics has overlooked an important form of interaction between the two levels of organisation. More specifically, our argument contributes to the 'second-image reversed' tradition of isolating international sources of domestic political change (Gourevitch 1978). Whereas scholars have devoted extensive attention to the domestic political determinants of international cooperation (e.g. Martin 2000), two-level-game bargaining (e.g. Putnam 1988), and domestic coalition formation in response to international developments (e.g. Gourevitch 1986), they have yet to map the domestic institutional implications of international bargaining. Our argument about the effects of summit negotiations on executive–legislative relations and intra-executive relations serves to advance this agenda.

Third, this article contributes to the growing literature on 'Europeanisation', by isolating an additional mechanism through which European-level decision-making feeds back into the organisation of domestic political systems. Research on Europeanisation addresses the ways in which the EU as an independent variable affects the policies, politics and polities of the member states (e.g. Cowles *et al.* 2001; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2008; Graziano and Vink 2007). However, to date, most of this literature has centred on the extensive and easily observable consequences on policy, at the expense of exploring the less evident and discernible effects on domestic institutional structures (Börzel and Risse 2006). Through our focus on chief executives, we identify a form of institutional change that merits greater attention. Moreover, our results endorse the notion that European integration serves to redistribute power among domestic political actors, rather than undermine state authority.

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Note

1. While emphasising the functional pressures generated by summit institutions that have conferred extensive decision-making power, we do not rule out that summitry may strengthen chief executives through other logics as well. For instance, the media exposure generated by summits, possibly even declaratory/symbolic summits, may translate into a special kind of political capital that can be used in domestic power games.

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