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# The Power of Institutions

## State and Interest Group Activity in the European Union

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### ABSTRACT

This article investigates the ways in which government activity, or demand-side forces, influence interest mobilization and formal inclusion in the policy-making process in the European Union. Drawing on an original dataset of nearly 700 civil society groups active in the European Union, the paper provides empirical evidence of three routes by which the EU institutions influence interest group activity: (1) direct interest group subsidy; (2) manipulation of the establishment and composition of formal arenas of political debate; and (3) broader, system-wide expansion of competencies and selective development of chosen policy areas.

### KEY WORDS

- advocacy
- Consultative Committees
- European Union
- institutions
- interest groups

## Introduction

Systems founded on democratic principles require balanced interest participation to produce representative policy. As many acknowledge, the process by which groups come to organize and participate in formal venues of interest aggregation is not as straightforward as classic pluralist theory suggests. Aggrieved parties do not simply mobilize and confront government as the need arises – there are additional forces at play, bolstering some and suppressing others. One of the most powerful of these forces is the prevailing set of governmental institutions. These structures can significantly influence the composition of the interest group environment and the behavior of organizations working within that community. Government can intervene to guide policy-making in a manner consistent with its political agenda.

Research on interest groups in modern democracies has established the importance of what I refer to as supply-side factors in understanding group mobilization and lobbying behavior. Supply-side forces are those interest-specific factors that push groups to organize and become active in the policy debate, such as Truman's (1951) ideas of disturbances, changes in the economic system, or changes in the social order – those variables that compel latent interests to become organized interests. Although supply-side forces are critical determinants of interest group mobilization activity, the concentration on supply-side forces has led scholars to overlook the importance of the external force of government, which also influences the behavior of interests. This force is manifest as demand-side pressures: activities by governmental institutions draw certain interests to action and shape the patterns of participation in policy debates; in this way the state can influence the level and nature of interest group activity. The terms supply and demand, although stemming from economic theory, are used here as a metaphor, not as a direct application of economic theory such as the more explicit supply and demand framework presented by Bouwen (2001).

This paper investigates three ways in which government activity affects interest group activity. The state can wield influence through: (1) direct subsidies, payments, grants, and other financial incentives, (2) determining which issues are afforded formal arenas of debate and which interests participate in those arenas, and (3) its own growth and levels of activity in different areas of policy.

The European Union offers a unique opportunity to investigate the importance of such governmental influence of interest group politics. Since its inception, political elites have worked to shape and mold the Union into a masterpiece of inter-state cooperation. Guided by the vision of an ideal supranational government structure, the EU institutions have been

proactively designed to cultivate ever greater economic and political integration. These institutions have strategically fostered interest participation that would be consistent with and conducive to further integration. The activity of the EU institutions allows us to test if such activities have affected the composition and behavior of organizations in the interest group environment.

I first discuss the importance of both supply- and demand-side forces in understanding interest group mobilization. I note that, although both are critical and interconnected, far fewer scholarly resources have been devoted to investigating how governmental activity acts as a demand-side force drawing and shaping interest group mobilization and participation. I then turn to an empirical analysis of each of the three forms of governmental influence. Using an original dataset of nearly 700 interest groups, I look first at the pattern of direct subsidy of interest groups. Second, I focus on the analysis of participation in formal arenas of debate: the Consultative Committee system. I present data on the differential stimulation of debate across issue areas as well as conduct statistical analyses of the variables influencing formal access to the policy-making process. Third, I present an investigation of the more invisible route of government influence, by demonstrating, first, the relationship between system-wide capacity expansion and the EU interest group explosion and, second, the relationship between the domains the EU emphasizes most and interest group activity in those policy areas. Determining the principal factors influencing the behavior of organizations active in the interest group community allows us to understand not only whose voices are being heard before European institutions, but why.

### **Supply- and demand-side influences on interest mobilization and participation**

Supply-side determinants of interest mobilization are reflective of the more traditional view of pluralist scholars: groups will mobilize as needed to protect and promote their interests before government. In this view, democratic leaders are responsible to the people; officials are influenced by 'interests who can, if aroused, make themselves felt in various ways' (Dahl, 1961: 152). From this perspective, private interests, not government institutions, introduce citizen concerns and highlight problems that need governmental solutions. In this manner interests set the agenda, guide policy debates and ultimately determine government activity. However, as many critics of pluralism came to point out, not all interests are able to mobilize and represent their preferences equally. Those with more resources have a better chance of

organizing and making their voice heard before government (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Further, those types of groups that are traditionally resource rich will compose a larger proportion of the interest group community and therefore have stronger influence on policy-making generally. As Schattschneider (1960: 35) colorfully put it in the American case, the chorus of the pluralist heaven sings with an upper-class accent. Previous research on EU interest groups has well documented the role of supply-side factors. It is clear in the EU, as in most democracies, that there is a substantial business bias and much lower numbers of organizations that represent the less affluent segments of society (Greenwood, 1997; Hix, 1999; Balme and Chabanet, 2002; Schneider and Baltz, 2003).

Although these supply-side factors are critical, organizations do not lobby in a vacuum; their mobilization and activity are influenced by their environment. One of the most powerful external forces working on interest groups is the government. The process of demand-side influence is quite different from the picture of citizen voices guiding government action painted above – an image more in line with traditional notions of democracy. With demand-side forces, the central governing body draws interests to it by increasing its attention to and control over certain policy areas. One of the most visible methods governments employ to guide activity is government contracts. By deciding what projects are to be funded and who will be responsible for bringing the projects to fruition, institutions guide policy debates and wield considerable control over interest activity. However, the demand-side techniques available to government are not limited to government contracts. Demand-side forces are at play in any governmental activity that draws interests to various areas of policy-making. Thus, the establishment of an agency or program, budgetary allocations to certain policy areas, the expansion of regulatory control and the formation of consultative committees or forums, the distribution of seats on those bodies, as well as direct subsidy of interest groups, all fall into the realm of government activity that influences the behavior of actors in the interest group community.

Studies of interest representation in the EU offer support for both supply- and demand-side explanations; indeed there is no reason not to expect to see both in effect. More likely, the two forces are complementary: where interests mobilize, government responds by encouraging participation by certain interests and guiding their activity toward some policy areas over others; this in turn compels additional interests to organize reactively and become active in a given policy arena. The result is a recursive pattern characterized by positive feedback. A distinctive example of this process is Baumgartner and Jones' (1993) description of the birth of a government program: a problem exists; some interests mobilize, drawing the attention of the government; government

in turn decides on a course of action to alleviate the situation (a single alternative is chosen from many); this often entails the establishment of a program (with its accompanying new institution, community of bureaucrats, and affiliated private interests); the existence of this new network then has vested interest in the perpetuation of the program. This type of positive feedback process is consistent with neofunctionalist treatments of European integration (Haas, 1958; Rosamond, 2000; Fligstein and Stone Sweet, 2002).

Theory then, as well as descriptive material on the European Union, suggests the possibility of influence of both types of forces. However, less emphasis has been given to the empirical research of demand-side factors. Empirical analysis of the interaction of supply- and demand-side influences is admittedly difficult; it would require time series data at fine enough intervals to tease out the relationship between the two sets of variables. Time series data of this nature on the range of variables that would be required for a well-specified model are extremely difficult to acquire on the European Union, as group activity has not been consistently tracked, and the developing nature of the Union makes collecting indicators of government activity an arduous endeavor. However, a systematic analysis of the relationships between governmental activity and interest group activity should illuminate our understanding of the demand side. In the following section, new empirical analysis is presented that provides evidence for the power of governmental activity to influence interest group activity. Each of the routes by which government wields its power is discussed in turn: (1) direct subsidy, (2) formal arenas of debate, and (3) government activity and attention.

## Empirical analysis

A fundamental requirement for effective investigation of demand-side forces on the EU interest group system is data on a large sample of organized interests. To this end, I compiled an original dataset of nearly 700 civil society groups<sup>1</sup> active in the EU from the European Commission's directory of voluntarily registered European-level civil society groups – Consultation, the European Commission and Civil Society (CONECCS, 2002). The dataset includes information on membership size and spread across the European states, organizational character, creation date, founding state, policy area concentrations, Commission funding, positions on consultation committees, and relations with Commission directorates general (DGs). Further, from this information I coded: the type of group from self-reported organizational objectives and the level at which the group is organized, as well as which organizations maintain a Brussels office.<sup>2</sup> Since these are self-reported data,

some organizations neglected to complete some parts of the form and therefore these omissions are coded as missing data.

### Direct subsidy

Demand-side forces should be expected to influence interest group activity when we realize that political institutions are not mere arenas accepting citizen pleas; government officials are themselves participants in the process (Baumgartner and Mahoney, 2002). Government can proactively foster interest participation. Such active participation is well supported in discussions of the European Commission. Scholars have described the ways in which the Commission actually 'molds' policy communities and encourages participation: 'the Commission may be able to build coalitions in favour of its own notions of desirable policy change . . . by assisting the formation of networks of "relevant" state and non-state actors, and by "massaging" the way that these networks operate' (Richardson, 1996/2001: 16). This is exemplary of demand-side influence.

In addition to concentrating attention and funding on certain policy areas, one of the most forthright methods of Commission 'massaging' can be found in the institution's direct funding of EU interest groups. The broader argument of this article, that government influences interests, leads to the hypothesis that the Commission's subsidization of interests is not equal across interest group types. Further, as Greenwood's (1997) survey suggested, and statements from the Commission purport, the Commission is likely to be funding citizen groups at a higher rate with the aim of fostering more balanced dialogue. This hypothesis finds strong support. As mentioned, financial information is voluntarily self-reported for organizations in the Civil Society Group Database and there is consequently a considerable amount of missing data. However, for the 64 groups that do report some level of funding from the European Commission, the majority are citizen or social organizations. As Table 1 shows, all business types (professional, trade and cross-sectoral business associations) combined make up only about 14% of Commission recipients, whereas citizen groups alone comprise some 44% of beneficiaries. Differential funding of interest groups suggests a conscious attempt to manipulate the composition of the interest group environment. As Table 1 makes clear, the direct role of outright subsidy may be seen as an effort by the EU to promote wider civil society participation, working to lessen some of the endemic biases inherent in the patterns of mobilization of different sectors of society. But the leveling effect of direct subsidy is more than counterbalanced by the two other effects of government activity: control over the formal arenas of debate and the growth and activities of government itself.

**Table 1** Types of groups receiving commission funding

| <i>Type of organization</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Citizen organization        | 28            | 43.75          |
| Youth/Education             | 11            | 17.19          |
| Trade association           | 5             | 7.81           |
| EU integration group        | 5             | 7.81           |
| Professional association    | 3             | 4.69           |
| Association of institutions | 3             | 4.69           |
| Religious organization      | 2             | 3.13           |
| Political association       | 2             | 3.13           |
| Federation of associations  | 2             | 3.13           |
| Labor union                 | 1             | 1.56           |
| Business association        | 1             | 1.56           |
| Research group/ foundation  | 1             | 1.56           |
| Total                       | 64            | 100            |

### Formal arenas of debate

I compiled an additional dataset for this analysis consisting of information on the 124 Consultative Committees of the European Commission. Combining this dataset with the Civil Society Group Database allows for a deeper understanding of how governmental institutions can influence the constellation of actors on policy debates.

The Commission has other methods to guide the political agenda and channel interest activity in addition to direct subsidization. The Commission determines the nature of interest representation in the policy-making process in a much more direct manner by selecting in what policy areas public debate will be fostered and which interests will participate in the formal forums of debate. This power is conducted through the Consultative Committee system – a major component of the legislative development process. Mazey and Richardson (1996/2001) allude to a recursive process regarding the committee system; supply- and demand-side forces lead to increased activity at the supranational level. This trajectory is precisely in line with the Commission's goals. 'The more the Commission stresses openness and consultation, the more new groups will come to Brussels. The more groups there are in Brussels, the more groups will want to come to Brussels' (Mazey and Richardson, 1996/2001: 228). The Consultative Committee emerges as a useful tool with which the Commission guides policy-making and a critical instrument through which interests can have their voices heard.

Successful interest representation requires more than mobilization;

groups also need to achieve some level of *entrée* into the formal arenas where policy is made. The importance of *access* has been well documented in the literature on advocacy in the United States. Truman (1951) points out that getting one's foot in the door is a critical step in the lobbying process: 'Interest groups cannot be successful in their endeavors if they lack "access to one or more of the key points of decision in the government"' (quoted in Ainsworth, 1993: 42). Though access is not a sufficient condition to achieve influence, it is clearly a necessary one – without it advocates never have a chance to sound their case or employ their direct lobbying strategy.

In the European Union, an important point of access to the policy-making process is membership of one of the Commission's formal Consultative Committees. These committees provide interests with opportunities for early input into the policy-making process, a strong advantage since 'the proposal-drafting stage in the Commission is an opportune time for interest groups to try to modify the shape and content of the contemplated legislation' (Dinan, 1999: 225). During the proposal drafting phase, the Commission refers to Consultative Committees for expertise and broad interest input, making considerable effort to engage non-governmental interests in the policy-making process. Christiansen (1996/2001) notes that this has been in part to increase its control; the Commission has circumvented 'potential obstruction of national governments by involving a wide range of non-governmental groups and interests in deliberation about new policy initiatives' (1996/2001: 99; see also Keating and Hooghe, 1996/2001). Although these 124 committees are just a portion of a vast body of expert and advisory committees, including those of the comitology system, analysis of the Consultative Committees considerably advances our understanding of the structure and biases of EU committees, and thus the range of participants at the critical early stages of policy development.

Since the Commission itself has full control over establishing the Consultative Committees and is the sole decision-maker on who is appointed to the committee positions, the committee system is an important aspect of its demand-side forces. The Commission establishes Consultative Committees to stimulate debate and activity on only certain types of policy question. Thus, I hypothesize the Commission does not establish Consultative Committees equally across policy areas. This hypothesis finds strong support in the data. The database of the 124 Consultative Committees includes information on the policy area in which each committee is active. The breakdown of how many committees exist in each area (see Table 2) shows that, like Commission funding, it varies across policy areas. About half of the Consultative Committee activity is consumed by just two policy areas: Agriculture and Employment and Social Affairs. Enterprise and the Environment are the next areas to exhibit high levels of Commission interest, indicated by respectively 19 and

**Table 2** Number of Consultative Committees by policy area

| <i>Responsible DG</i>          | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|--------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Agriculture                    | 35            | 28.23          |
| Employment and Social Affairs  | 30            | 24.19          |
| Enterprise                     | 19            | 15.32          |
| Environment                    | 17            | 13.71          |
| Health and Consumer Protection | 8             | 6.45           |
| Education and Culture          | 5             | 4.03           |
| Energy and Transport           | 2             | 1.61           |
| Information Society            | 2             | 1.61           |
| Development                    | 1             | 0.81           |
| External Relations             | 1             | 0.81           |
| Fisheries                      | 1             | 0.81           |
| Internal Market                | 1             | 0.81           |
| Regional Policy                | 1             | 0.81           |
| Trade                          | 1             | 0.81           |
| Competition                    | 0             | 0              |
| Enlargement                    | 0             | 0              |
| Research                       | 0             | 0              |
| Justice and Home Affairs       | 0             | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>124</b>    | <b>100</b>     |

17 committees being established to debate policy proposals in these areas. The Commission has expended considerably less effort to foster interest input in the areas of Enlargement, Research, and Justice and Home Affairs.

As previously mentioned, it is difficult to tease out the precise routes of causation, and most likely there is a positive feedback process at play. That is, the Commission decides in which areas it will establish committees, but that decision is likely influenced by the activity of organized interests. Organizations in the Agriculture and Employment and Social Affairs domains may be especially well organized and that concerted interest group activity influences the Commission when it allocates agenda space and EU resources. However, that governmental attention and related policy output inevitably lead to more mobilization by organized interests – both by those who could benefit from the direction in which policy-making is currently going and by those whose interests are threatened by new policy proposals (Truman, 1951). Although the supply-side force of interest group advocacy undoubtedly plays a role in the distribution of political attention, the Commission also wields substantial power. As the rest of this section demonstrates, the EU institutions have the ultimate say in whose voices are heard in the formal arenas of debate.

In order to investigate the types of interest included in these Consultative Committees, I coded whether or not each of the 685 organizations held a position on any of 125 Commission Consultative Committees. A sense of the nature of the 'insiders' interest group community is apparent by looking at the types of groups that are included in the committee system. There is cause to predict more balanced interest representation on the committees as the Commission seeks to produce good public policy. Mazey and Richardson (1996/2001: 228–9) note that 'consulting as many stakeholders as you can find is rational in terms of gaining the best knowledge and information' and further that 'relying on producer groups for advice, however technical and accurate it might be, is a risky business in terms of legitimacy'. In an effort to achieve balanced interest input, a more level playing field might be found in the committee system compared with the interest environment at large. Table 3 provides a comparison of the distribution of group types in the two arenas. The two environments show remarkable similarity. Far from fostering balanced dialogue, the committee system reinforces the bias of the interest group community. Business remains the dominant force, making up approximately 72% of the groups (trade, business and professional) holding a committee position. There may be some evidence of the Commission's purposeful inclusion of citizen groups, as they attain a slightly higher level of representation in the committee system (2 percentage points). However, combining trade and business associations shows business to be overrepresented by 10 percentage points. Thus the distribution of group types offers some insight into the biases of the committee system. The skewed representation found in the interest group environment is replicated in the committee system, and in certain cases magnified. The Commission considers actors in the interest group universe and makes deliberate decisions regarding who will participate in the formal consultative bodies and who will be excluded.

Next, we turn to a systematic effort to predict membership. Multivariate analysis is used to investigate the factors affecting inclusion on a consultative body and the level of participation of organizations within the committee system. In both cases, the null hypothesis would be no systematic relationship between interest group characteristics and selection; that is, slope coefficients of zero. However, if the Commission is consciously manipulating the interests that sit at committee tables, we will see statistically significant relationships between organizational characteristics and their probability of participation.

### *Factors affecting committee participation*

The literature on American interest groups provides substantial evidence that resources matter in the advocacy process and are especially critical in the

**Table 3** Relative composition of Consultative Committee system

| <i>Organizational type*</i>          | <i>Interest group environment</i> |                | <i>Committee system</i> |                |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|
|                                      | <i>Number</i>                     | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Number</i>           | <i>Percent</i> |
| Trade Association                    | 349                               | 51.93          | 112                     | 59.57          |
| Citizen or Ideological               | 87                                | 12.95          | 28                      | 14.89          |
| Business                             | 32                                | 4.76           | 13                      | 6.91           |
| Professional                         | 82                                | 12.20          | 12                      | 6.38           |
| Association of EU regions            | 15                                | 2.23           | 7                       | 3.72           |
| Union                                | 8                                 | 1.19           | 5                       | 2.66           |
| EU integration group                 | 18                                | 2.68           | 4                       | 2.13           |
| Youth/student                        | 28                                | 4.17           | 3                       | 1.60           |
| Federation of associations           | 4                                 | 0.60           | 2                       | 1.06           |
| Political group                      | 7                                 | 1.04           | 1                       | 0.53           |
| Research group                       | 8                                 | 1.19           | 1                       | 0.53           |
| Religious                            | 15                                | 2.23           | –                       | –              |
| Association of institutions          | 18                                | 2.68           | –                       | –              |
| Association of international regions | 1                                 | 0.15           | –                       | –              |
| Total                                | 672                               | 100.00         | 188                     | 100.00         |

*Note:* 13 organizations could not be coded as to group type owing to limited information on group objectives.

achievement of access to key decision-makers (Hall and Wayman, 1990; Hall, 1998; Smith, 1984). Control of resources allows groups to conduct research, build their informational resources, increase their communications efforts, establish their name in the interest group community, and broaden their tactical repertoire; in short, assets increase the organization's chance of influencing policy. A resource set, however, is a multidimensional entity, composed of assets in the forms of capital, members, information, and credibility. Here I consider the effects of a number of factors – organizational level, permanent presence in Brussels, organizational age, number of member states and candidate countries represented, and group type – on the ability to gain access by way of a position on one of the European Commission's Consultative Committees.

Capital is critically important; from it all things flow. Without a substantial budget it is difficult to have a large staff, hired help, and the ability to conduct in-house research, or to maintain numerous offices, among other things. Money allows groups to develop and use other types of resources; as

Schlozman and Tierney (1986: 89) point out, 'what makes money important in politics is its convertibility – the fact that it can easily be transformed into other valued political resources'. Information on EU interest group budgets is not available, but some types of groups are generally better endowed financially (i.e. the business groups) than others. Therefore, trade, professional and cross-sectoral business groups should be expected to have more income at their disposal than citizen or culture groups and thus be likely to have a higher probability of being included in the committee system. I include dichotomous variables for citizen, institutional (i.e. universities), regional government, and political groups, leaving business groups as the baseline.

Maintenance of a Brussels office provides a rough proxy of resources. Keeping a permanent representative in the European capital is a costly endeavor and suggests at least some significant level of resources. Further, a presence in the European capital suggests a higher level in engagement in the interest community and likely significantly more informational resources. As Greenwood (1997: 9) notes, 'a Brussels base is a prerequisite for any interest seeking a role in the EU and for whom the stakes involved in European public affairs are significant'. Groups that maintain a Brussels office should have a higher probability of holding a Consultative Committee position than those organizations that are based elsewhere.

However, material resources are not the only assets that organized interests control; groups also need to exhibit credibility. Organizational age provides a proxy for credibility. Since older groups have been established in the policy-making community for a longer time, group age shows stability and the ability successfully to maintain the organization over time, to bring in resources, and to recruit and retain membership. Organizations that have a history of active involvement in the policy community are presumably better networked with other groups and government officials. Age as a resource does not likely function continuously – each year adding more to the strength of the resource – therefore the log of age is included in the analysis.

Another source of reputational strength is available to groups that can claim to represent a broad range of constituents, be they individuals, regions or nations. The Commission is more likely to listen to a group that can claim to represent a large majority of member states and candidate countries than to those that can speak for only a handful of nations. Therefore, the greater the number of West and East European nations a group represents, the higher their probability of holding a committee position.

Similarly, EU umbrella groups and federations are seen as being able to speak for a broader constituency than are groups organized at the national and subnational level. Groups of higher levels of organization should be more

likely to hold a seat in a Consultative Committee. Indeed, observers have noted that the Commission appears to recognize groups organized at the EU level more readily. Michalowitz (2001: 13) points out that there has been 'a preference of the European Commission to listen to Euro Groups rather than to individual actors'. Hull (1993: 86) similarly notes: 'Commission officials tend to appreciate a representative lobbyist or interest group which can speak on behalf of a cross-section of interests throughout the Community.' My ability to test this is limited because there is little variation in the Civil Society Group Database in terms of the range of organizational levels – it includes no groups from the subnational and national levels. I am, however, able to test the differential effect of organization at the international level (defined as organizations with membership beyond the nations of the EU) and the EU level. This is coded 1 for international groups and 0 otherwise. Approximately 100 groups are organized at the international level and the rest are organized at the European level.

I use a logit model to analyze the effect of these various indicators of organizational resources and characteristics on whether the group does or does not hold a position on one of the Commission's Consultative Committees (the dependent variable is coded 1 if the group holds a committee position, 0 otherwise). Logit estimation is most appropriate owing to the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable and the high occurrence of zero values. Only 197 groups out of the entire data set report holding a position on a Consultative Committee. This means there is a high concentration of zeros, and logit models are more appropriate to such distributions (Liao, 1994: 25). Results are reported in Table 4.

A number of organizational characteristics are significant.<sup>3</sup> The maintenance of a *Brussels office* is significant and has a substantial effect on the probability of participating on a committee. If a group establishes a representation in the European capital, it increases its chances of being on a Consultative Committee by 18 percentage points, holding all else constant. Broader representation of the European member states (*number of EU states represented*) also increases the probability that a group will be included in the formal consultation process; with a one unit increase in the number of nations represented, an organization increases its probability of holding a committee seat by 1 percentage point. Representation of the East European countries (*number of EE states represented*) does not appear to weigh as heavily. *Institutional group* is the last factor significantly to affect the probability of committee inclusion and such groups are less likely than business groups, the baseline, to be on a committee, as seen by their negative sign.

The logit analysis suggests resources do matter. Maintenance of a Brussels office, a broader member state base, and residing within the business sector

**Table 4** Factors affecting whether a group holds a Consultative Committee position: Maximum likelihood logit regression

|                              | $\beta$ | S. E. | $P > z$ | Discrete changes  |                        |
|------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|-------------------|------------------------|
|                              |         |       |         | $0 \rightarrow 1$ | Centered<br>$\Delta 1$ |
| International organization   | -0.227  | 0.382 | 0.553   | -0.026            | -                      |
| Brussels office              | 1.063   | 0.303 | 0.000*  | 0.186             | -                      |
| No. of EU states represented | 0.088   | 0.044 | 0.044*  | -                 | 0.011                  |
| No. of EE states represented | 0.046   | 0.031 | 0.142   | -                 | 0.006                  |
| Organizational age           | 0.106   | 0.130 | 0.414   | -                 | 0.013                  |
| Citizen group                | -0.434  | 0.305 | 0.154   | -0.047            | -                      |
| Governmental group           | 0.153   | 0.749 | 0.838   | 0.020             | -                      |
| Institutional group          | -2.152  | 1.045 | 0.039*  | -0.127            | -                      |
| Political group              | 0.005   | 0.524 | 0.992   | 0.001             | -                      |
| Constant                     | -3.278  | 0.651 | 0.000*  | -                 | -                      |

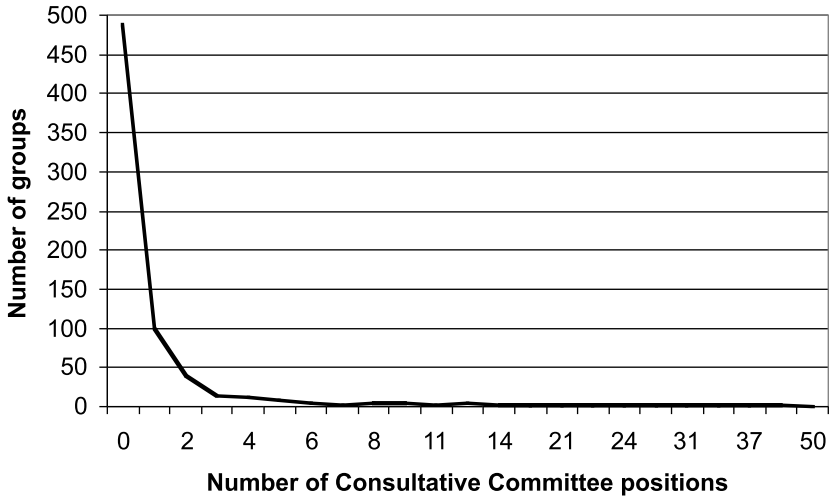
$N = 434$   
 $\text{Chi}^2 = 39.39$                        $\text{Prob} = 0.00$   
Pseudo  $R^2 = .0805$

\* Indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

all contribute to a higher probability of holding a seat on one of the Commission's committees.

### *Factors affecting high levels of participation*

Internal group characteristics are not the only factors affecting committee participation; there is reason to predict that groups that already have access may gain more access as a result. Inclusion on a Consultative Committee may be tantamount to some level of formal recognition. Some scholars have viewed access as a fairly fixed resource, creating 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Those with access often maintain the felicitous situation, whereas those without access continue to find it difficult to gain entrance. Hansen (1991: 12) notes, in the American context, 'close consultation with interest groups – granting access – is a congressional strategy for dealing with uncertainty . . . and as long as current counsel is adequate, members of Congress, like most people, prefer to stick with what has worked in the past'. This suggests that interests that have gained entrance to the Commission in one Consultative Committee may be much more likely to receive a seat on another committee. Moreover, interests benefit from committee positions; membership of a consultation committee provides a group with the valuable resource of insider



**Figure 1** Number of Consultative Committee positions held by groups.

information, which serves to increase its resources base and further set it apart from 'outsider' groups (Banazak, 2002).

Figure 1 suggests this may be the case with EU Consultative Committees. The vast majority of groups, two-thirds in fact, hold no committee assignments at all. However, those organizations that have been granted a committee seat tend to hold more than one; and a small minority is included on a disproportionately large number of Consultative Committees. It seems surprising that so many groups are granted no consultative positions at all, whereas some groups are included on as many as 47 Consultative Committees – that is, 40% of all of the Commission's committees. The organization holding this grand total is the farm lobby COPA. Other often-included groups are the European Consumers' Organization (37), the Confederation of Family Organizations in the European Community (32) and the European Community of Consumers' Cooperatives (31).

Have these groups received some unofficial but fundamentally important recognition from the European Commission? Clearly some groups are dramatically favored in the process that determines membership on official committees of the EU. The different forces affecting higher levels of participation by organizations within the committee system can be explored with a multivariate regression for count data. To attain the best estimates of the effect of the explanatory variables on the number of positions an organization holds within the committee system, I use a zero-truncated (or left-truncated) Poisson model. These models have a zero probability associated with a zero

value and are ideal for estimating models where the dependent variable is recorded only on the occurrence of an event (Cameron and Trivedi, 1998: 199). This model is most appropriate owing to the nature of the dependent variable: the number of committee positions held for those organizations that are active within the committee system (therefore every actor has a minimum value of 1 on the dependent variable).

Table 5 shows the results of a zero-truncated Poisson regression on the same set of explanatory variables used to predict whether or not an organization holds any committee seat.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that the factors affecting whether or not a group is included in the committee system are different from the factors that lead to high levels of participation once the organization is 'inside'. Comparing the results from the logit and the Poisson regressions, lack of a Brussels office nearly ensures no committee participation but it has no effect on the number of positions a group holds.<sup>5</sup> Euro-level groups, though, do have higher levels of participation, whereas international organizations show a significant and negative relationship to the number of positions held. International groups are likely to hold two positions fewer on average, all else equal. Governmental associations are also less likely to hold positions, significant at the .1 level; on average, they hold about one position fewer than do business groups (the baseline) on average.

A number of factors lead to higher levels of participation. The number of member states an organization represents (*number of EU states represented*) has a significant positive effect. This is in line with accounts in the literature of the Commission favoring groups that can speak for a broader range of constituents. In addition, groups that have been established longer (*organizational age*) do appear to be signaling some type of credibility or stability that the Commission is cueing on – the log of age is positive and significant at the .01 level. The largest significant and positive effect is seen for *citizen groups*. This is an interesting finding considering that citizen groups are a relatively smaller proportion of the committee system compared with business and professional groups (as exhibited in Table 3).

Combining the findings from the logit analysis and the zero-truncated Poisson regression, a clear process emerges of groups gaining access and gaining committee seats. First, an organization will have a higher probability of being included in the Consultative Committee system if it maintains a Brussels office, if it can speak for a broad range of member countries, and if it is a business or institutional association. Second, once an organization is 'inside', it will achieve higher levels of participation under four conditions: if it is organized at the European and not international level; if it is older – conveying some type of legitimacy or stability; if it has members from a large number of member states; and if it is a citizen group. Not all groups are equal

**Table 5** Factors affecting the number of committee positions held by groups in the committee system: Zero-truncated Poisson regression

|                              | $\beta$ | S. E.        | $P > z$ |
|------------------------------|---------|--------------|---------|
| International organization   | -1.596  | 0.317        | 0.000*  |
| Brussels office              | -0.272  | 0.162        | 0.093   |
| No. of EU states represented | 0.158   | 0.032        | 0.000*  |
| No. of EE states represented | 0.010   | 0.013        | 0.447   |
| Organizational age           | 0.315   | 0.068        | 0.000*  |
| Citizen group                | 0.869   | 0.121        | 0.000*  |
| Governmental group           | -1.090  | 0.659        | 0.098   |
| Institutional group          | 0.129   | 0.671        | 0.847   |
| Political group              | 0.218   | 0.274        | 0.426   |
| Constant                     | -1.730  | 0.465        | 0.000*  |
| $N = 109$                    |         |              |         |
| Model $\chi^2 = 151.95$      |         | Prob = 0.000 |         |
| Pseudo $R^2 = .1787$         |         |              |         |

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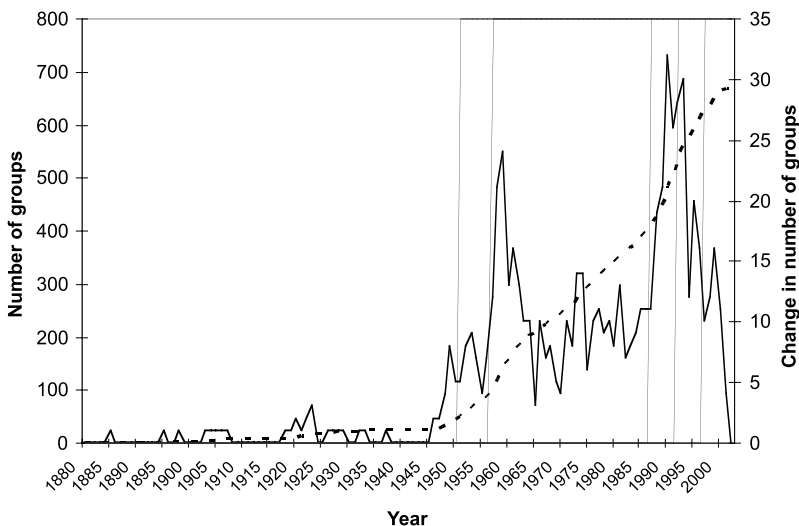
\* Indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

in the eyes of the Commission – who is selected and how often are very much determined by group characteristics.

### Government activity and attention

This section again relies on the Civil Society Group Database, which allows the analysis of the more invisible influence on interest group activity of the sheer level of government activity and its attention to certain policy areas. These data will specifically enable me empirically to assess the hypotheses that (1) the more the general size of government expands, the higher the level of total interest group activity in the policy-making arena; and (2) the policy areas in which the EU is most involved will also display the most interest group activity.

The first expectation would suggest that, as the EU's competencies expanded with the adoption of successive European treaties, the number of groups would increase as well. Evidence of this demand-side process can be seen in Wessels' analysis, which 'indicates major shifts of numbers of interest groups after the launch of the EEC in 1958, the Single European Act in 1987, the first level of the currency union, and the Maastricht Treaty' (forthcoming: 10). He finds little evidence that groups were forming in expectation of supranational expansions to come.

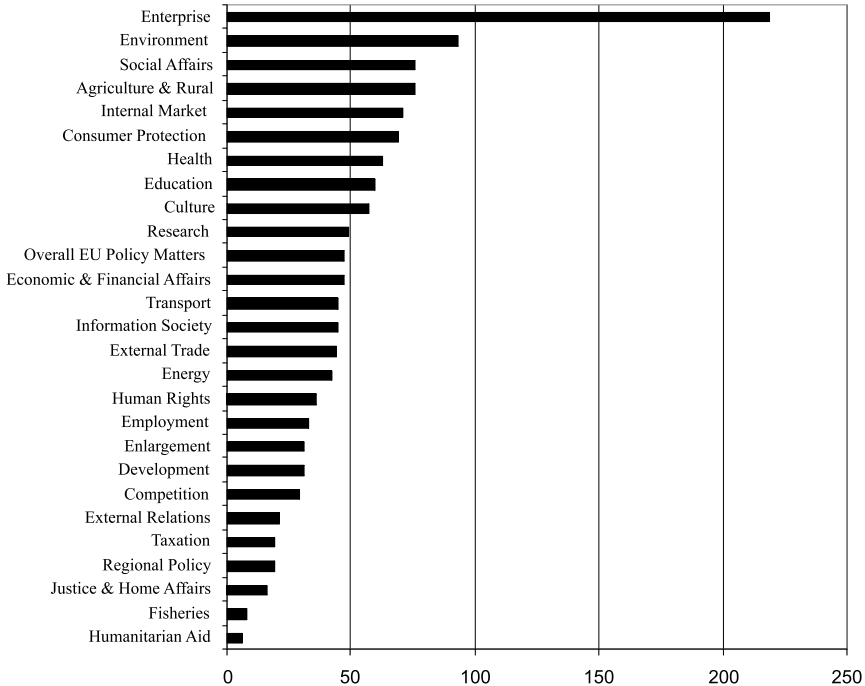


**Figure 2** Number of organizations founded over time.

*Notes:* Markers are 1951–ECSC, 1957–EEC, 1987–SEA, 1992–TEU, 1997–Amsterdam. The dotted line is the cumulative number of groups.

Data from my analysis of the Civil Society Group Database corroborate Wessels' earlier findings. Figure 2 shows the growth of EU groups over time, with markers denoting the year of each of the major EU treaties: the 1951 Treaty of Paris forming the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the 1957 Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), the 1987 Single European Act (SEA), the 1992 Treaty on European Union (TEU), and the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty. The data on the total number of groups are drawn from the reported founding dates of groups in the Civil Society Groups Database; it therefore cannot account for groups that were formed but have since become defunct.

There are considerable jumps in the number of groups founded following the 1951 Treaty of Paris, the establishment of the EEC in 1958, and the 1987 signing of the SEA. Action by the European institutions in the form of the major treaties appears to have propelled groups toward higher and higher numbers. An impact assessment provides only tenuous evidence of significant effects of the treaties on group growth; however, this weakness is owing in large part to the instability of the growth series. It would therefore be premature to rule out any 'treaty effects'. In addition, any model with event impact series as the sole independent variables is likely to be mis-specified. However, the data in Figure 2 do demonstrate that, although not every treaty and expansion had a significant effect, the overall growth of the institutions of the EU over time corresponds with growth of the interest group system.



**Figure 3** Number of organizations indicating activity in policy areas.

Turning to the second hypothesis, policy areas that have significant government activity would be expected to have larger numbers of mobilized groups. Although the range of group types is constantly expanding in the EU and the scope of EU policy also continues to broaden, activity is not distributed evenly across all policy areas. Rather, there is considerable variation in the level of activity across policy areas as exhibited in Figure 3, which plots the number of groups indicating activity in the policy area.

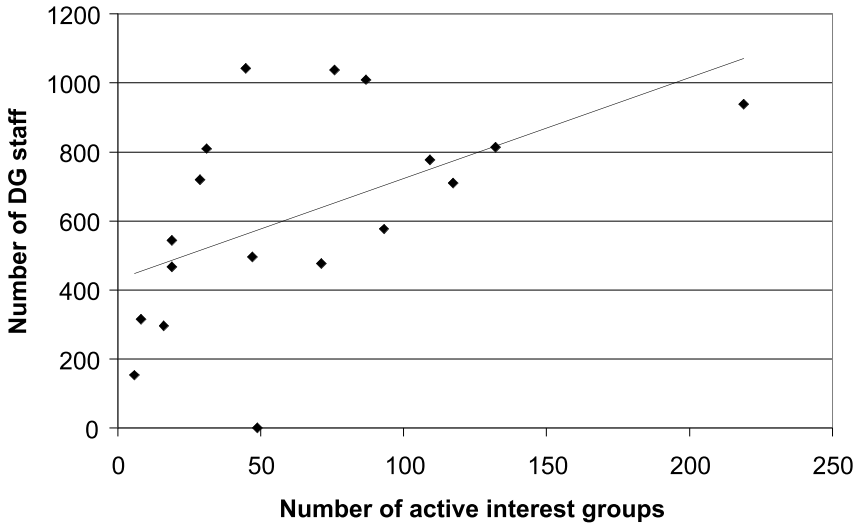
Enterprise has generated by far the most interest. However, contrary to what the distribution of groups in the broader interest community might suggest, the two policy areas that show the next highest levels of activity are social policy and environmental policy – policy areas that at first blush appear to be the domain of citizen groups. However, citizen groups are not the only participants in these areas; the high levels of activity are owing in part to the involvement of business groups. Business is greatly affected by EU environmental policy and employment policy and therefore actively protects its interests in debates concerning environmental legislation and worker health and safety. McCormick (1999: 203) argues that business effectively dominates the policy area: ‘interests are unbalanced and industry has considerably more

influence over the legislative process than environmental NGOs'; as a result, EU policy 'reflects more fully the priorities of corporate Europe than it does of NGOs and European consumers'. Although this statement is speculative, the Civil Society Group Database appears to corroborate McCormick's point: of the 93 groups that noted being active in the environmental policy area, business, professional and trade associations comprise 72% of participants, whereas citizen and cultural groups constitute only 19%. Government activity therefore can be seen to spur group mobilization, but not all groups are equally able to mobilize. A combination of demand and supply effects is therefore best able to explain the constellation of groups in Brussels.

The simple activity differences cannot tell us anything about the effect of demand-side factors; interest activity must be compared with government activity. Greenwood (1997: 9) notes 'in broad terms, the greater the degree of competence the EU enjoys in a functional domain, the higher the stakes are likely to be, and the more likely it is that an interest has invested resources in organizing in Brussels'. Leech et al. (forthcoming) make a similar argument: the distribution of lobbying is influenced by government activity. They find evidence of demand-side forces in the United States and show 'how the degree of government involvement in an issue area contributes to the size of the populations of organized interests in those areas'. Therefore in the EU, sectors with higher levels of government activity (indicated by the size of the area's directorate general), such as Agriculture and Enterprise, should correspond to high levels of interest group activity in those policy areas.

Figure 4 presents a scatter plot comparing the size of the relevant DGs, measured by total number of staff, with the numbers of groups active in the policy area.<sup>6</sup> There is a strong relationship between government involvement and interest group activity: as the Commission devotes more human resources to a given policy area, the number of interest groups active in that domain similarly rises. The Commission is clear in its intent to set the EU agenda and proactively guide which areas receive substantial government consideration. Its statement regarding Activity Based Budgeting (ABB) is suggestive of demand-side forces: ABB's 'main objective is to assure that the allocation of resources is a politically driven process whereby resources of all types are distributed in a manner that is consistent with pre-defined political priorities and objectives' (Commission of the EC, 2002).<sup>7</sup> This analysis suggests the Commission sets priorities and allocates funds accordingly – influencing interest group activity in the process.

Again, as with the variation in the distribution of Consultative Committees, the Commission's decisions regarding the distribution of resources across the policy domains is likely to be affected by interest group activity. Organizations in Enterprise and the Environment are likely to be well mobilized and advocating further action at the EU level in these areas.



**Figure 4** Relationship between Commission size and interest group activity.

However, when the government responds by devoting financial resources to the DGs overseeing the sector and policy is subsequently developed, this governmental activity compels more groups to mobilize – either to propel policy-making further in its current direction or to attempt to thwart it if they find their interests threatened by the new policy proposals. While interest group activity is a critical factor, the Commission has ultimate say in its financial allocation and thus also remains a critical part of the explanation of the variation in political attention.

The number and distribution of groups are significantly influenced by demand-side forces that stem from a proactive set of supranational institutions. The EU's expansion of competencies in the form of successive treaties spurred the formation and activity of more and more interests. Further, the Commission has been able to direct activity toward policy areas it views to be the highest priority for the Union. By increasing staff and funding for DGs overseeing what it believes to be critical policy areas, it draws higher levels of interest involvement to those debates.

## Conclusions

The traditional consideration of supply-side forces has not been misplaced. How groups come to mobilize and the factors that promote or inhibit the organization and action of some groups over others are important research

questions. It is also necessary, however, to recognize the influence of demand-side forces.

This paper has laid out important governmental powers affecting interest group mobilization, formal access, and active participation in the EU interest group system. Throughout this process, supply- and demand-side forces are at play. This article has highlighted the importance of recognizing the effect of the demand side. The EU institutions actively draw interest activity toward EU policy-making. A proactive and openly federalist Commission – with the support of the other supranational institutions – has guided interest activity to encourage further European integration.

Demand-side pressures are felt in numerous ways. Here I have concentrated first on how the EU institutions have influenced the interest group community through direct subsidy of interest groups.

Second, the EU institutions have affected interest participation in formal arenas of policy debate. The Commission's development of the Consultative Committee system has fostered interest input and thus has directly drawn interest activity to Brussels. The Commission has attracted interest groups to certain topics by establishing Consultative Committees in some areas and not in others. It has affected interest activity by selecting and magnifying the influence of the groups most in-line with its agenda: business groups that have traditionally fostered integration; EU-level citizen groups supportive of EU programs beneficial to European citizens; groups that can speak for a broad range of nations; groups that are committed to supranational politics, as seen in their maintenance of a permanent representative in the European capital; and finally older groups, which have demonstrated their commitment to EU politics over a number of years.

Finally, the EU institutions have altered interest group activity through the expansion of competencies via successive treaties, drawing an ever increasing number of groups to EU politics. Further, the purposeful growth of certain DGs, through staff and funding, has increased activity in some policy areas over others. These findings combine to suggest a significant role for demand-side forces in understanding EU interest group activity.

It is important to remember that the dataset underlying the analyses presented here does not include lobbyists such as corporations, institutions (universities, hospitals), or for-hire lobbying firms. However, the findings apply to a large portion of the EU interest group community – membership and federated organizations across sectors and policy areas. Future research on a sample drawn from the entire EU interest group universe will shed more light on the extent of the influence of governments on interest activity.

Governmental institutions have a remarkable and often unrecognized ability to influence the dynamics of the interest group system. This influence can be brought about through incremental expansion of powers in treaties

and escalation of control over specific issues by way of new legislation and regulations, as well as through budgetary allocations and the establishment of programs, agencies, and committees. Through these instruments, government draws interest groups to certain policy areas over others and consequently is a major determinant of the character of the prevailing constellation of active interest groups.

## Notes

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I would like to thank Frank Baumgartner, Suzanna DeBoef, Marie Hojnacki, Quan Li and the reviewers for their helpful comments. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2003 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association; I would like to thank participants for their critiques and suggestions.

- 1 Hereafter referred to as the Civil Society Group Database. It is important to note that the database should not be taken to represent the entire universe of lobbyists in Brussels. Rather, the majority of organizations in the dataset are EU level and it does not include corporations or for-profit professionals (hired lobbyists, PR firms, etc.).
- 2 Information on the frequency of group types can be found in Table 3.
- 3 This analysis was run only for those groups that provided membership information, owing to the inclusion of the two variables: the number of member states in which the organization has members and the number of candidate countries in which the organization has members. The CONECCS website has an additional form that organizations can complete on the spread of their membership across the EU member states and candidate countries. However, not all groups fill out this additional form; specifically, 250 organizations failed to provide this information. Therefore, the logit is run for an  $N$  of 434 (685 total groups minus 250 groups missing membership data and one group that has membership information but is missing data on its founding date). There does not appear to be any pattern to the spread of the membership of those organizations missing data. Plotting those groups missing data on these two variables by group type and whether the organization has a Brussels office shows an even distribution of missing data. I used 'Amelia' (King et al., 2000) to create five imputations of the data set, and estimated the logit model on each of the imputed data sets, each with an  $N$  of 685. The resulting slope coefficients and standard errors calculated from the five estimations are nearly identical to those presented in Table 4, which uses listwise deletion. The signs of the coefficients remain the same for all variables save one, which is not statistically significant in either estimation. The magnitudes are similar and the same three independent variables are the only variables that achieve statistical significance. The complete estimation results are available from the author. I do not present the imputed results since it is difficult to feel secure in the reliability of values of the spread of membership imputed from the available data of group type, resources, and organizational age and since there is evidence that the data are missing at random (MCAR).
- 4 This analysis is done for only 109 groups – the number of groups with one or

more committee positions (197) minus those that are missing membership data. Again, this estimation was also run on imputed data using King et al.'s (2000) 'Amelia' program, imputing values for the organizations that are missing data on membership spread. The maximum likelihood estimation of the zero-truncated Poisson on the imputed data ( $N$  of 197) produces similar results to those from using listwise deletion. The only difference in statistical significance emerges in the significant finding in the imputed data results for the 'candidate country membership' variable, which is insignificant in the estimation that uses listwise deletion. The complete estimation results are available on request. Again I present the results using listwise deletion because they are likely to be more reliable (containing no imputed values derived from questionable information) and unbiased (owing to the randomness of the missing data, an estimation on the subset of organizations with full data should not produce biased estimates).

- 5 Running a series of logit regressions for four levels of participation (0 positions/else; 1 position/else; 2–8 positions/else; 9+ positions/else) shows that, whereas a Brussels office has a significant effect for having no positions, it does not have a significant effect on any other level of participation.
- 6 The available Commission DG information was collapsed for a number of policy areas: Employment and Social Affairs; Energy and Transport; Education and Culture; Health and Consumer Protection. In these instances the groups active in the areas were also combined. The Commission distinguishes between 'Indirect' and 'Direct' Research, whereas interest groups report only on activity in 'Research' generally, therefore this category was omitted. Further, it appears that the 'External Relations' human resources count includes staff in EU offices abroad; it is therefore inappropriate to include this indicator as measuring the 'size' of this DG in Brussels, and it has likewise been omitted.
- 7 Budget and human resources data come from the European Commission at: <[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/budget/abb/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/budget/abb/index_en.htm)>.

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