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Chapter 1

Introduction

Public and private interests regularly contribute to the perception, presentation and definition of issues in European Union (EU) policy making, are routinely present in the everyday politics of EU policy making and implementation, and have been used to assist with explanations of the course of European integration.

Ernst Haas first outlined how European integration arose from the relationship between organized interests and the EU central institutions as a result of their mutual interests in the transfer of competencies to the European level. In this account, private and public interests, nurtured by the Commission, act as forces upon Member States to seek EU level solutions for particular desired outcomes (E. Haas, 1958). The history of the EU has provided many examples of this, most notably through the role of the European Round Table of Industrialists, representing a select constituency of the leaders of Europe's largest firms, as a progressive force in the achievement of the European Single Market. Whilst other events in the course of European integration have demonstrated that this mechanism cannot be applied as a universal explanation of the integration process, the explanatory possibilities quickly answer the 'so what' question about EU interest representation. That is to say, rather than being a specialist pursuit best left to enthusiasts, the study of interest representation in the EU can help explain how public policies emerge, how they are framed and processed, why they take the character they do, and how they might contribute to our understanding of the course of European integration.

Whilst EU politics cannot be reduced to 'organized interest politics', the latter are one of the tools of the EU policy analyst, and sometimes a key one. The task of this book is to provide an account of the dimensions of organized interest politics, and when and how it matters to the EU policy process and to the

course of European integration. The EU political system is one in which no one type of interest, such as producer or civil society public interests, can routinely dominate. This is because of the multiple levels of EU policy making, the diffusion of power between its constituent parts, its accessibility to a range of interests, and its sheer complexity. These factors make policy making difficult to predict, and sometimes 'insulate' it from private interest demands as policy making shifts venues between different institutions with different constituents, each with a different *modus operandi* (Grande, 1996).

Whilst such factors conjure pluralist images, they do not by themselves justify slapping a 'pluralist' label on the EU political system or its policy making character, although this has frequently been done (Streeck and Schmitter, 1991; Wessels, 1997; Mazey and Richardson, 2001). This is because, under certain conditions, it is possible for the interests of one specialized constituency to routinely prevail over particular policy arrangements. Such a scenario does arise where policy making takes on a highly technical character and is formulated away from democratic arenas in which benefits are concentrated upon a narrow sectional interest and the costs are diffused widely across civil society. EU policy making can be highly segmented, with a high degree of specialization, geared around the input of expertise evidence over which private interests may have a monopoly. Dominance may also arise where the interests of a particular constituency are consistent with the broad thrust of European integration and with the climate in which policy making arises, and which allows an interest constituency to define and 'frame' issues from which policy initiatives later flow.

Interests contribute to, and are highly influenced by, the climate of ideas of EU policy making in the circles to which they have access. Brussels can be an insider's town, where operating effectively depends upon a dense network of interpersonal and interorganizational links, and where it is very difficult for outsiders to arrive, win the day through persuasion, and go home again. Yet, in another scenario, sometimes the voices of organized interests are no more than contributors to a public debate in which the will of other players, such as Member States, dictates the flow of EU policy making and integration. In these circumstances of 'high politics', organized interests are just one of the many components contributing to the positions which Member States adopt. Thus the EU system as a whole is not 'captured'

by private and public interests, it is not largely insulated from them, and it is not driven by them.

In the above analysis, it is clear that the special institutional character of the EU, and in particular its fragmented system of power, creates a unique environment in which private and public interests operate. The EU is not a 'state' but a unique configuration, and the EU organized interest system does not therefore resemble those of other states. It is not Berlin, or Paris, or London or even Washington, though it may share attributes arising from structures in common with these political systems, and contain aspects that are recognizable to 'interest group' analysts. Because of its multi-level power architecture, EU policy making does not arise predominantly from exclusive, impenetrable and settled enclaves drawn from a small number of civil servants and producer interests who have come to know each other over the years and who have arrived at a common belief system which drives the choice of durable policy instruments. Neither does chaotic anarchy prevail, in which just about anything can happen at any time, although certain policy making passages which go the distance through the complex labyrinth of venues tend to produce a high degree of unpredictability. As Chapter 2 outlines, the type of policy making procedure deeply influences the extent to which 'organized interest politics' matter, ranging from decision arenas which are impenetrable to outside interests, to those which are highly susceptible to them. Added to this variation is that different types of policies (e.g., regulatory, redistributive, distributive) invoke different kinds of interest constituencies, and where these involve a different pattern of dispersion of costs and benefits (narrowly or widely) they result in different types of underlying politics (Lowi, 1964; Wilson, 1995). 'Organized interest politics' typically tend to prevail only in circumstances where costs and/or benefits are concentrated upon particular constituencies, whilst different configurations of constituencies will arise depending upon whether a measure impacts on a whole category of interest (e.g., business) or just a particular segment of it. Thus, as is clear from the chapters to come, there is variation in the extent to which organized interests matter to EU policy making, and some degree of analytic order that can be imposed on this variation.

There is much that can be understood about EU interest representation from examining the two-way relationship between political institutions and outside interests. The first of these

perspectives considers the impact of organized interests upon political institutions, while the reverse considers the impact of political institutions upon interests. In this latter scenario, EU institutions provide a structure which conditions interest intermediation through providing a set of rules, routines and procedures, and an interactive setting in which the exchange of ideas comes to influence those who participate under their umbrella. The role of EU institutions, either in whole or part, in developing (and seeking to develop) European integration and the arenas in which interests seek to operate, is also a considerable one, particularly in fields where EU competencies are contested entities. This has been particularly true in public interest and labour market fields (Chapters 7 and 8), where issues such as environmental policy and equal opportunities have been driven forward either by particular sections of the European Commission as a 'policy entrepreneur' with interests in the policy field or simply in bureaucratic expansion, or by landmark rulings delivered by the European Court of Justice.

Whilst the impact of organized interests varies in different institutional settings in the EU political system, they tend to feature in most. Organized interests may well form part of the environment in which Member States make their decisions on the big issues of European integration in the European Council, and can also be found in the machinations of Member State decision making in the Council of Ministers. Although the European Court of Justice cannot be 'lobbied', there are 'openings' for interest representation (Harlow and Rawlings, 1992). More obvious are the roles organized interests perform with the central institutions of the EU. These range from their most natural and important venues in the European Commission and European Parliament, to the consultative institutions (Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions) through to 'sectoral' institutions, such as the European Investment Bank and EurAtom. In the wider EU governance structures, too, such as standardization committees, organized private and public interests play a considerable role. These roles are outlined in Chapter 2.

Organized interests are the 'natural constituencies' of the Commission and the Parliament. As allies in the drive for European integration, they reduce the dependence of these institutions upon national administrations (Bellier, 1997), and form

a demand constituency upon Member States. They also help nurture popular support for European integration, and thus organized interests have historically been an important means of contact for EU central institutions that are remote and lacking in democratic legitimacy. Lobbying of the EU political system demonstrates its legitimacy, such that the European Parliament, prior to the Treaty on European Union when it acquired powers beyond being consulted, spent time trying to attract lobbying of itself. Although the increasing powers acquired by the European Parliament have eased the structural remoteness of the EU from its citizens (its 'democratic deficit'), the core problem remains. In particular, the structural remoteness of the Commission from 'street level' in the Member States remains and, together with the declining confidence in mainstream institutions of democracy, such realities mean that the quest for legitimacy drives the relationship with organized interests. Public participation in the EU remains stubbornly low, public support for it is highly variable across the Member States, and public understanding of the EU is somewhat patchy. Without democratic legitimacy, there are severe limits to the development boundaries of European integration.

In addition to these factors, organized interests provide some unique benefits to the European Commission: they are a source of support for its role in drafting legislation; they are a means of 'testing out' proposals among stakeholders, and the ways these are likely to be received in different national settings ahead of the Council of Ministers; they seek out points of view about them; and, for the Commission's role as guardian of the Treaties, they collate information about the implementation of measures, and their impact. These can be summarized as the function of acquiring information, intelligence, specialist knowledge and input. In this role, the small size of the Commission relative to its functions sometimes makes it dependent upon the expertise that outside interests bring for drafting workable and technically feasible policy proposals. One Commission official reflected that:

we are terribly understaffed and over stressed. My division is responsible for 44 directives and 89 regulations; monthly mail which requires a substantial answer numbers about 350 pieces. And I have about nine staff to deal with all of this.

The corresponding administration in the US has 600 people. (Burson Marsteller, 1991, p.22)

In the above circumstances and writing in a similar era, it is not surprising that the Secretariat of the Commission should record that:

The Commission has always been an institution open to outside input. The Commission believes this process to be fundamental to the development of its policies. This dialogue has proved valuable to both the Commission and to interested outside parties. Commission officials acknowledge the need for such outside input and welcome it. (Commission of the European Communities, 1992, p.3)

This dependency upon ‘outside input’ for information sources remains as true today as it did when these statements were written a decade ago. Since then, attention has increasingly been drawn to the potentially dysfunctional nature of these dependencies upon specialized interests, and to the paralysis that the collective weight of interest representation can bring to EU policy making. These issues are explored more fully in Chapter 2 and also in Chapter 6, but the EU agenda focus upon addressing ‘democratic deficit’ through encouraging citizen participation, ensuring equality of access and accountability together with transparency and standards of policy making, and access to information, has become increasingly important in structuring EU interest representation in recent years. The culmination of these factors can be found in the Commission’s 2001 White Paper on Governance (WPG) initiative (European Commission, 2001b). While the WPG disappoints in the detail of its specific proposals and is receding into background, its broader agenda is reappearing in different guises and may have a lasting impact upon the climate in which the EU institutions engage with outside interests. There is already a tendency towards open consultation on initiatives through the Internet which is beginning to challenge previously exclusive policy discussion arenas, while a summer 2002 communication on consultation emphasizes the need to involve non-organized interests (European Commission, 2002a).

For all these reasons, elite and closed ‘policy communities’, in which policy is driven from the shared and mutually reinforced beliefs of a small number of interdependent players with access to common but select information and thinking, are far less common at the EU level than at the national level. EU policy making is much more open (Chapter 2). A further contributory factor is the way in which the EU political institutions can insulate themselves from private interest pressures as a result of the fragmentation of EU powers. In an extension of his analysis outlined earlier, Grande draws attention to the way in which the Commission can cleverly insulate itself by drawing attention to the need to make measures acceptable to the other institutions, and to other actors (Grande, 1996). Taking this further still, a number of commentators draw attention to the way in which the Commission is adept at the game of ‘divide and rule’ (Tyszkiewicz, 1991, 2001; Wallace, 1997). For Helen Wallace, ‘the Commission is often a deliberate instigator of pluralism’ (Wallace, 1997, p.13).

The variety of interests in Europe

The variety of interests with a stake in European public affairs is vast. It includes firms, professions, employers and labour groups, consumer, cause, social/community, citizen and environmental interests, at European, national and sub-national levels of organization, and territorial interests themselves, such as regional and local government. These act alone, or collectively, in EU public affairs although, despite the growth of individual company lobbying over the past decade and informal structures which network them, it is still formal collective entities that dominate EU interest representation. Representative EU associations geared towards political action exist for:

- multinational firms through to natural sausage casing artisan producers;
- accountants, doctors and lawyers through to chimney sweeps, showmen and beauticians;
- engineers to fish pathologists and handwriting analysts;
- mine workers to fairground hands;
- aquarium trustees to cyclists;

- regions and big city municipalities to networks of wine growing regions;
- environmental and animal welfare campaigners to those campaigning for health enhancing physical activity;
- bird conservationists to specialist bird ringers;
- mainstream consumers to beer-drinking enthusiasts;
- human rights to Quakers, young people to older women, and citizens through to drug helplines.

The known numbers and different types of players active in EU public affairs are listed in Table 1.1.

There are, of course, various caveats of detail that might be made about these figures. In scope, they do not embrace the full range of ‘interest actors active in EU public affairs’, an issue of some complexity which requires detailed analysis beyond the scope of this introductory chapter but which is covered in Chapter 2. Thus, they do not attempt to record actors engaging EU public affairs from national bases, or the labyrinth of informal networks. In detail, there is much that could be said about company public affairs offices, such as definitional issues about what constitutes an ‘EU public affairs office’, and whether it is fully visible. Detailed analysis of some of these categories can be found in the chapters that follow. These issues apart, the above figures are presented as the best available indications.

Most of the available indicators of change over time refer to the number of formal EU level interest groups. With few exceptions, these emerged as Europe’s post-war construction developed (Sidjanski, 1967), such that Eising cites more than 100 in existence by 1959 (Eising, 2001a). The journalist, Watson, records a growth from 400 groups in 1970 to 800 in 1991, but doubling just three years later to 1,674 in 1994, and growing steadily thereafter up to a total of 2,000 by 2001 (Watson, 2002). In between, Andersen and Eliassen (2001) cite a figure of 439 in 1980, taken from an Economic and Social Committee register. Butt Philip and Porter (1997), similarly, record a steady growth from 300 in the 1960s to 750 in 1990, then dramatically increasing to 1,200 in 1997, while Wessels cites a growth from 200 in the 1960s to 2,200 in 1995 (Wessels, 1997). Whilst the absolute number of groups in these figures should be treated with considerable caution (see the discussion in ‘Groups’ below), they do at least provide some consistent indications of

TABLE 1.1 *Types and number of interest actors active in EU public affairs*

<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>
Formal interest groups addressed to EU	1,450
of which those in Belgium	829
of which those in Brussels	768
Companies	350
of which those with public affairs capacity in Brussels area	250
National interest groups with Brussels offices	170
Offices of regions in Brussels	171
Law firms in Brussels	125
Commercial public affairs consultancies in Brussels	143

Sources: EurActiv (2002); Euroconfidentiel (2001); European Commission (2002d); Landmarks (2001); Scotland Europa (2002a); Union of International Associations (1999); author's research.

growth over time, with the key growth period appearing to be the early 1990s.

More uncertain still is the number of individuals involved in 'EU lobbying'. This endeavour raises definitional issues of such magnitude that it is difficult to provide a figure of much value at all, and because of this estimates tend to differ greatly between 10,000 and 30,000, although none of these are claimed to be anything more than 'estimates'. Perhaps of greater utility as an indicator of activity levels is the number of annual passes (3,400) issued by the European Parliament to 'outside interests' wishing to have regular access to its premises for public affairs monitoring purposes (Watson, 2002), a scheme which is described in greater detail in Chapter 2. These figures should be compared with the number of policy making officials working in the European Commission, numbering approximately 6,000.

A variety of factors explains these levels of civil society activity in engaging the EU political system. The most obvious among these are the extent to which the EU now governs public life, with an estimated 50 per cent of all legislation (and over 75 per cent of economic legislation) passing through Member

State parliaments bearing a ‘made in Brussels’ stamp. ‘European Union’ involves scenarios to be fought for or resisted, a canvas to be drawn and a battle of ideas, what the picture should include, what the agenda should be, with new rules of market exchange to be devised, new standards set, and the detail of regulation to be fought over. Thus, the key to the future prosperity of many interests seems to lie there. Some go to build agendas, others to react to them. The multiple level architecture of the EU, together with the accessibility of much of its policy making, makes it easy for them. A major factor is also the part played by the European Commission, both through its role in drafting policy initiatives, and through its need to work with outside interests in pursuit of European integration. This latter role provides a source of funding for a large number of public interest groups and for trade unions, and for some a *raison d’être*. A number of groups, particularly in public interest fields, have been kick-started directly by Commission departments in search of allies, and sustained through functions delegated to them by the Commission. Indeed, many interests have become over-dependent upon the Commission, either for funding or as a source of support to achieve their aims.

Whilst the characteristics of the EU already outlined mean that no one type of interest does routinely dominate, there are summary sketch caricatures that can be drawn of the significance of these. The sections and chapters that follow make it clear that the most significant types of interests in both quantity (see Table 1.3 in the following section on ‘Groups’) and quality of EU public affairs actors and impact are those of business (Chapter 3), and public interests (Chapter 6). Trade unions (Chapter 5) have struggled to make an impact and have on the whole under-invested in their EU organization, although this is most true of the professions (Chapter 4). Territorial interests (Chapter 7) have not made the breakthrough that seemed possible when the Committee of the Regions was established a decade ago, and indeed the rules of structural funding mean that the regional offices they have established in Brussels have little role in this process.

As outlined earlier, there are circumstances under which a particular business interest can be influential within its domain, and the general history of the EU single market project has been driven by wealth creation needs aimed at establishing the conditions in

which business can flourish. Advocacy couched in these terms has a head start. However, a number of business interests would see the general influence of business as somewhat less than that of public interest considerations in modern EU politics. Whilst it may be common to under-estimate one's own influence and inflate that of one's 'opponents', the general analysis that business may be less influential than some of the 'business rules OK' theses suggest (see, for instance, Balanyá *et al.*, 2000), while public interests may do better than might otherwise be thought, is the right one. Features arising from the multiple level of EU architecture do prevent one type of interest from routinely dominating and, as is explained in the section below, the numerical superiority of business public affairs actors is partly informed by a landscape of competition, but across the product chain and within a specific segment of the product chain. The driving force of European integration, market liberalization, touches business interests in different ways. One of the most striking features of empirical evidence is the diverse outcomes in terms of 'winners'. A recent collection of case studies on air pollution, auto oil, road transport, pharmaceuticals, product liability and safety each concluded that business interests did not overwhelm in the final outcome (Lehmkuhl, 2000; Young and Wallace, 2000). And, as is argued in Chapter 3, some of the bulwark business wide organizations with historic reputations, such as the European Round Table of Industrialists and the EU Committee of the American Chamber of Commerce, are not quite the organizations they once were. This point is returned to in the conclusion to this chapter.

In addition to these perspectives can be brought those which point to the relative strength of public interests in EU public affairs. A 1999 Commission communication on 'The Strategy for Europe's Internal Market' reflects the norms that have driven public interest considerations in recording that: 'it is unchallengeable that the Community must respond to growing public expectations about the quality of life and sustainable development. This demands that these are seen as core internal market objectives' (Young and Wallace, 2000, p.4).

In this scenario, public interests are not just occasional beneficiaries of the need of producer interests to make concessions to them to maintain their broad support for the wider prize of European integration. As will be evident from Chapter 6, public

interests have made a real impact upon the climate of ideas in which policy making arises, on the thinking of policy participants, in relation to politicizing issues and bringing them from closed private arenas to open public ones, and upon producer groups with which they engage. Whereas a substantial population of business groups active in EU public affairs are national, the balance of public interests active of EU level are overwhelmingly European (Wessels, 1999). Some well resourced and effective pockets can be found among citizen interests. For instance, the Brussels offices of environmental public interest groups have over 70 staff between them as well as the potential support of around 1,000 staff in their European national offices, and countless supporters to call upon if necessary. These realities, together with the openness of the EU political system and its orientation towards citizen interests in an effort to solve its 'democratic deficit', mean that many of the areas in which business interests operate are contested by public interests. For pockets of the Commission, citizen interests have been key allies to match their entrepreneurship in driving forward European integration in new or under-developed arenas of social policy. They have filled the 'advocacy void' which the absence of transnational political parties (Aspinwall, 1998) or an EU media (Beyers, 2001) has created. This conclusion is shared by Young and Wallace, who have argued that:

civic interests receive greater consideration in the EU than one would expect given its regulatory focus and economic origins ... the imbalance between civic and producer interests may thus not be as great as a quantitative comparison would indicate, because producer interests are often divided and the political dynamics of social regulation often play to the benefit of civic interests, making the outcomes more 'balanced' than might otherwise be expected. (Young and Wallace, 2000, p.28)

Civic interests are therefore thoroughly embraced by EU policy making, whether in concept or as organized interest groups. Broader grass roots citizen mobilization is almost absent from EU politics, largely because of the fragmentation of EU powers and the lack of a 'target' (most EU-oriented demonstrations arise in Member States from narrow interest constituencies), and because of the logistical difficulties of sustained transnational mobilization (Imig and Tarrow, 1999, 2001). There is no

new dimension here waiting to be discovered. EU politics is institutional politics and there is little room for ‘social movement analysis’ couched in grass roots mobilization.

Groups

Despite the growth of alternative fora and channels, the status of formal groups organized at and addressed to the EU level as the mainstay of EU interest representation justify a particular focus upon these actors in this book. Whilst there are also common factors of limitation to them arising from the multiple architecture of the EU and their narrow functions, as introduced below, there is considerable variation among the constituency of groups in their significance and their ability to unify their members’ interests and act collectively upon them. Much analytic order can be imposed on this variation, and much that can be lent to the literature on collective action from the study of EU level groups. These issues are explored in some depth in Chapter 3 and beyond.

There is no one accepted authoritative head count of formally constituted interest groups organized at the EU level, and indeed guesstimates tend to vary wildly. My own composite of six different directory sources (listed at the foot of Table 1.1), used in conjunction with other research sources (such as newspaper job advertisements), indicates a figure of 1,450 formally constituted EU level groups of all types, based in Brussels and elsewhere. This figure is somewhat less than others that have been popularly cited, although few of these withstand very much scrutiny. For instance, the figure of 3,000 has found its way into folklore as a result of its repetition, not least because of the authoritative sounding nature of the original source, a 1992 policy document from the Secretariat of the European Commission. The actual language used in the original document was somewhat more speculative, reflecting that ‘at present there are thought to be approximately 3,000 special interest groups of varying types in Brussels’ (Commission of the European Communities, 1992, p.4). Indeed, the unit responsible for producing the estimate saw it at the time as no more than a rough and ready guesstimate, based on assumptions then in circulation, of the number of interest groups present in Brussels, organized at the EU level and otherwise, and never intended it to be cited authoritatively.

Citations of other figures sometimes fail to make clear how these were arrived at (e.g., Watson's '2000 in 2002': see Watson, 2002; or Marks and McAdam's '5000 by early 1996': see Marks and McAdam, 1999), or include in the head count of 'interest groups' those such as law firms, think tanks, consultants and conferences (O. Gray, 1998), or are reliant upon single directory sources without identifying the categories used in the count (e.g., Wessels, 1997). Whilst there are a number of useful directories in the public domain, my own experience is that each has gaps, and only produce a reliable figure through detailed compositing.

Table 1.2 identifies the geographical distribution of EU level groups. Whilst a minor surprise is that only 59 per cent of groups are based in Belgium, around 85 per cent of all groups are located within a 2½ hour train ride from Brussels, with significant numbers based in Paris, London, Bonn, The Hague and Amsterdam. Indeed, the introduction of the TGV (*Train à Grand Vitesse*) service linking these centres with Brussels has made round trip day travel an easy reality, with a particularly fast service from Paris. This has had the impact of reducing the number of French nationals working in Brussels-based EU public affairs in recent years (Guéguen and Rousseff, 2000), and the amount of time spent on Brussels networking by interests from these centres as staff hurry back for their return travel while others stay on after meetings. These issues apart, it is the professions which have a particularly high concentration of EU level groups based outside the Brussels travel area; this reflects their generally weak EU organization, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Historically, the Commission has been extremely active in developing the landscape of EU level interest groups. There are a number of ways it has done this, outlined below, ahead of examples provided in each of the following chapters on different types of interests. First, it has worked directly with interests themselves to establish the groups it needs to engage with. A good number of groups have started life in this way, sometimes through the creation of informal dialogue fora, sometimes through operating a major conference event, and sometimes even through Commission officials fashioning them directly themselves. Second, it has provided considerable resources for them to establish and sustain themselves, even when the Treaty basis for them to do so was contestable (Chapter 6). Recently, a policy document

TABLE 1.2 *National locations of EU interest groups*

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Belgium	829	59
France	119	8
UK	97	7
Germany	95	7
The Netherlands	74	5
Switzerland	26	2
Italy	24	2
Luxembourg	18	1
Others	126	9
Total	1,408	100

bearing the names of the Commission President and Vice-President estimated that the Commission allocated over €1,000 million each year to public interest groups through core or project funding (European Commission, 2000a). Third, it has nurtured them through the formative years by asking them to undertake quasi-official functions on behalf of the Commission, such as supplying information or operating telephone hotlines to report on the implementation of EU legislation.

A fourth measure the Commission has undertaken has been to make access to it very easy. It has done this through practices such as publicizing the direct telephone numbers of responsible officials, holding dialogue events in Brussels, operating advisory committees with expenses-paid places handed out via European-level groups, and in making information easily accessible. It has steadfastly refused to try to ration the number of groups through accreditation practices, and where there has been criticism of ‘special interest lobbying’ it has moved quickly to encourage them to develop self-regulatory codes and representative bodies with which to engage in dialogue (Chapter 2). Fifth, in its early days, the Commission operated a policy of dialogue only with European-level (Euro) groups as an incentive to national groups to form such groups. In practice this proved unworkable, because the presence of Euro groups was patchy and, where they existed, some were unrepresentative, weak in building meaningful platforms among their members or little more than symbolic presences. In response to this, the Commission has engaged in

friendly private, and even public, criticism where groups have fallen short of their requirements. Where these practices did not result in the presence of Euro groups, or delivered representative groups strong enough to meet their needs, the Commission engaged in dialogue with national groups (Caporaso, 1974) or, more recently, with large firms and other entities. Today, it will talk to any organization that wishes to engage it, as described below. Despite this latter drift, there remains an official policy statement still in force, from the department of the Commission that leads relations with civil society (Secretariat General), which records that 'the Commission tends to favour European [con]federations over representatives of individual or national organisations' (European Commission, 1992, p.5). Taken as a whole, for all the reasons already outlined in this chapter, the Commission continues to work strongly with Euro groups as partners in European policy making and integration, although there is substantial variation in culture and practice towards groups between Commission departments (European Commission, 2002a).

There are pockets of Commission practice which still emphasize consultation with Euro groups over other types of interest outlets, and there are formal groups which work so well that they meet almost all of the Commission's needs in engaging with outside interests. For instance, the relevant departments of the Commission turn first to EuroChlor, the European Chlorine Association, for its data on chlorine before other sources, including Member States, because it has a first class record for providing reliable data to public authorities, and a monopoly over the production of specialized information in the form the Commission needs it. The practice of handing out places on Commission advisory groups through Euro groups is still standard. Examples can often be found where individual interests engaging the Commission alone are politely listened to and then told to engage the collective group, followed by a call from the Commission official to brief the group secretary on the approach made. But some studies suggest that there are now at least as many examples to be found of practice the other way, where Commission departments lean towards engagement with large companies rather than groups. Bouwen, for instance, found that large individual firms had a higher degree of access to the Commission than do EU level associations (Bouwen, 2002). This is discussed in the final section below and more fully

in Chapters 3 and 4, but it partly stems from the frustrations that officials have experienced from working with groups who have been routinely unable to reach positions beyond the lowest common denominator, and from the inability of some to communicate grass roots business issues. Trade association staff are generally ‘industrial civil servants’ rather than practising business people. Mazey and Richardson report on an interview with a Directorate General (DG) Internal Market official who set up a ‘Market Practitioners’ Group’, who wanted to contact people ‘whose bread and butter it was to work in the markets, who might come across the problems we identified in their day to day practices’, and admitted this caused ‘a lot of bad blood with the federations because we end up bypassing them’ (Mazey and Richardson, 2001, p.226). This type of scenario is frequently cited – there are further examples provided in Chapter 3 – but sometimes over-generalized. As with the EuroChlor example above, some associations, usually as a result of a certain combination of sectoral and external conditions (Chapter 3), have a monopoly over the production and supply of certain information (those in the cement, steel, and airline sectors provide other examples). Some EU associations, such as those in the oil and gas sectors, have a technical information bureau allied to, but legally separate from, themselves, whose remit is to supply the Commission with technical information. These are well able to engage with the Commission at a technical level on issues involving their industry, and to resolve the Commission’s difficulties of a lack of resources for policy making purposes. An example of the latter is provided by FEDESA (European Federation for Animal Health), which, in its 2001 Annual Report, cites a member of Commissioner Monti’s cabinet telling them ‘we did not know it was so difficult to simplify’ (FEDESA, 2002, p.2).

Formal groups range in scope from those organizing ‘horizontal’ interests across a particular constituency (such as confederations of producer interests or citizens), to sectoral type interests, to specialist issue organizations. With very few exceptions, these have organizations as members, rather than individuals, and because most of these member organizations are already highly oriented towards political action, so membership densities tend to be high and collective action relatively uncomplicated (Chapter 3). With no direct mass movement groups, very few

have undertaken direct protest action on the streets of Brussels. EU business associations organize national associations, or large firms, or both. Trade unions and associations of the professions organize national organizations of workers. Consumer organizations organize national organizations of consumers, and other public interest groups do likewise for their constituencies, or alternatively have Brussels offices which act as outreach offices for the wider international organization, such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth.

The large groups representing 'horizontal', or cross-sectoral, interests include: UNICE (Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe), based around national federations; ERT (the European Round Table of Industrialists) and the EU Committee (of the American Chamber of Commerce), both based around large firms, and at one time among the most influential and admired of all business groups; UEAPME (European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises), the lead organization for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), and EUROCHAMBRES (the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry), representing Chambers of Commerce, and increasingly pitching itself as a representative of small firm interests among a host of other contenders for the title (Chapter 3); CEEP (European Centre of Public Enterprises), representing public-sector employers; ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation), the principal (though not sole) organization representing worker interests (Chapter 5), and CEPLIS (European Council of the Liberal Professions) those of the liberal professions (Chapter 4). Sub-national interests are represented horizontally through the CEMR (Council of European Municipalities and Regions) and the Assembly of European Regions (AER: see Chapter 7). Public interests are represented by a host of organizations, of which the most 'horizontal' is ECAS (European Citizen Action Service). Others are 'horizontal' within their own domain, such as BEUC (The European Consumers' Organisation) EEB (European Environmental Bureau), and the European Platform for Social NGOs: see Chapter 6). These operate alongside other household names in the public interest arena, such as Amnesty International and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), together with other significant players in the public interest arena, such as the European Youth Forum and the European Women's Lobby. Full examination of particular

TABLE 1.3 *Types and percentages of formal EU interest groups*

<i>Type</i>	<i>%</i>
Business	66
Professions	11
Trade union	3
Public interest	20
Public sector	1
Total	100
Total number	1,450

Sources: EurActiv (2002); Euroconfidentiel (2001); European Commission (2002d); Landmarks (2001); Scotland Europa (2002a); Union of International Associations (1999); author's research.

types of interests is provided in Chapter 3 (business interests), Chapter 4 (the professions), Chapter 5 (labour interests), Chapter 6 (consumer, environmental and social/citizen concerns) and Chapter 7 (territorial interests). The proportions in which they are represented is provided in Table 1.3.

While most of those working in EU public affairs thus do so on behalf of business interests, numerical majority should not be equated with 'degrees of influence'. Some amusing examples have already been provided of the specialism apparent in sectoral and issue groups, although this is a symptom of a more serious underlying problem, in the sense that high specialization brings with it both competition for the interest category, and system overload. The factors that result in such specialization are introduced below, ahead of further analysis in Chapter 3.

Business interests turn to specialism as a means of achieving collective coherence in the absence of alternative stimuli, and as a means of pursuing their specialist agendas in public affairs. Whilst it is normal in any environment for business interests to differ across the product chain, such as producers of raw materials (upstream) and those who convert these into market-ready consumer products (downstream), the organization of EU business interest associations goes some way beyond these natural divisions into extreme specialization. For instance, the eight

member companies of the European Vegetable Protein Federation have highly similar interests which make it easier to work together and to pursue their specialist objectives in public policy, rather than to composite them with other types of specialisms in general food associations. Another example is the glass industry, where there are specialized associations dedicated to the interests of flat glass, container glass, cut glass, domestic glass, reinforcement fibreglass, and insulation fibreglass.

Such a high degree of specialism arises because the multiple level architecture of the EU enables members to by-pass their representative groups, while the EU's associated lack of state properties prevents it endowing groups with authority as representative entities charged with public policy functions, as is common in countries with corporatist features such as much of Germanic Europe. In pre-war Germany, some 50 per cent of industry regulation was undertaken by controls exercised by trade associations (Schneiberg and Hollingsworth, 1991). Whilst modern competition policy has long since restricted the tasks that business interests undertake, and a Nazi Germany war machine imposed somewhat specific historical circumstances, the comparison of the different extremes of authority environments structuring associations is worth making. EU trade associations can never be used as singular governance structures because authority is so widely dispersed in the EU political system. As has been outlined earlier, this fragmentation also results in some degree of system insulation from private interest pressure because decision-making changes venues in which entirely different rules of the game apply. Arrangements settled with the European Commission have to be protected through and between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, and are almost always subject to change.

Another major difference between national interest groups and those at the EU level lies in the resources at their disposal. EU level groups operate on a much more restricted resource base than national groups, largely as a result of their restricted functions and specialization in political representation. For instance, EU level trade associations do not undertake the range of functions that national groups undertake, such as the provision of business services and advice, industry training and export promotion, because they were established by their members to

provide for their political representation in EU public affairs. This means that they are dependent upon membership subscriptions for resources, rather than having their own independent resource streams. Taking all types of Euro groups together, almost half have a turnover of less than €100,000, most have fewer than five staff, and a few are ‘virtual’ organizations. Whereas in the Member States many interest groups, particularly business interest groups, may be sitting on sizeable assets through owning the premises they work from, in Brussels many rent offices at the values of a booming lease market. In 2002, average Brussels office space costs were €250 per square metre, plus service charges (Lontings and Neven, 2002). For all these reasons, some have become over-dependent upon their members for basic resources such as office space, equipment and staff, at the cost of a loss of autonomy. The importance of this latter factor for group effectiveness is outlined in the chapters ahead.

There are differences between the types of interests in the magnitude of disparities between EU and national level associations. It appears to be greatest in the case of the professions, where there is a pattern for well endowed national associations to invest little in their EU associations. Whilst there is variation, on balance many national associations of the professions perceive European integration to be more of a threat than an opportunity, particularly where they are self-governing entities (Chapter 4). Here, there is a generalizable pattern of the secretariats of EU level associations being broadly in tune with the Commission’s agenda to expand European integration, with much greater variation among national associations. Where there are already significant powers invested in national associations, and little interest in liberalization, so national associations are much less interested in, and defensive towards, integration. Where liberalization is seen as a solution, and does not involve the erosion of powers towards the national association, so there are common interests as regards investment in European integration and in EU level associations. As some examples show in the forthcoming chapters, there are often great variations among the national associations within a particular sector, sometimes in general terms and sometimes on an issue by issue basis. Only where the balance of power among national associations generally coincides in common interests

for more European integration can the EU association expect to take up a pivotal role for its members.

Less extreme, though still marked, differences can be found amongst other producer interests (Chapters 3 and 5), while some of the least marked differences between the resource levels of national and EU associations may be present amongst public interest groups. Some of these organizations, such as the European Youth Forum with 24 staff and an annual budget of €2 million (Geyer, 2001; European Youth Forum, 2002), are relatively well resourced by any comparison. The Brussels offices of wider international movements, such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth Europe, and the World Wide Fund for Nature, as well as having reasonable resourcing levels of their own, have the substantial resources of multi-million (in euro terms) international organizations behind them. To these can be added the resources invested by the Commission in the development of public interest groups as partners for them in the wider process of building support for European integration. The overall picture should not, however, be exaggerated, in that for some public interest groups the reality may be a cramped, shared office relying upon part-time worker support, in which they find difficulty in identifying any headway made on EU public policy within their field of interest. The vulnerability of some is illustrated by the case of the Confederation of Family Organizations in the European Union, or COFACE (Chapter 6). COFACE has lost its long held status as one of the leading (and earliest established) EU non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and consumer associations, and its office has shrunk from 11 staff to three in the space of three years as a result of the withdrawal of Commission funding.

Whilst there is a limiting environment common to all groups, there are interesting patterns and factors of variation in their significance and their ability to unify their members' interests and act collectively upon them. The results of some recent research on variation among business interest associations are presented in Chapter 3 (business interests), arising from characteristics of both the industry represented and factors related to the association. In sum, industries with the characteristics of high transaction volume and costs, over-capacity, production of commodity products, similarity in firm size, with well-defined sectoral boundaries, and those facing significant external

threats, have made significant investments in their association. Thus, industries such as cement, steel and chlorine tend to work strongly through associations in which they invested and endowed significant capacity, while industries such as retail and tourism have weak associative patterns.

Non-group actors: companies, single interests, and commercial providers

The growing number and presence (see Table 1.1) of non-collective actors in EU public affairs can partly be attributed to the structural problems with groups, and to the multiple level architecture of the EU affording access to such players. But a factor of considerable importance is also the increasing degree of EU public affairs activities of large firms over the past two decades, particularly during the early 1990s. Large companies turned their interests to European integration as a strategy of future prosperity in the early 1980s, and the logic of the single market has been to increase aggregate size of the largest firms, resulting in the ability of these to fund EU public affairs offices. Once these were established and staffed, so a web of informal networks and network organizations arose between them (Chapter 3), and commercial public affairs consultancies flourished from the business they provided. Analysis of directory sources suggests that the number of companies with Brussels public affairs offices has stabilized in recent years, while there has been consolidation amongst commercial public affairs consultants through a process of mergers and acquisitions. A less visible sector, though at least as significant as consultants, are law firms which provide both public affairs and legal services to the community of EU public affairs players, of which large firms form a substantial market. Relatively little knowledge is available in the public domain about the contribution that law firms make to EU public affairs, and the ways in which these are distinct from regular public affairs consultancies, although their potential to offer something unique seems likely to provide someone with the chance of an intriguing investigation.

Anglo and American firms in particular, familiar with operating in pluralist environments, are used to working outside groups and with commercial public affairs consultancies, whereas

those used to the corporatist traditions of Germanic countries tend to place a greater emphasis upon associations. One piece of recent research suggests that the Anglo/Germanic division also works in preferences for the type of commercial sources used, with Anglo-American type firms using traditional public affairs consultancies and Germanic firms using law firms (Lahusen, 2002). These different clienteles tell their own story of the utility of commercial consultancies in the arenas in which they work, and to them can be added public interests and public sector organizations, including agencies of central government in the Member States. As with all consultancy services, commercial public affairs organizations can add value but will also have limitations. They can provide a useful monitoring service and source of advice, substitute for a Brussels presence or know-how where resources do not permit it, and be a 'campaign driver' in times of need, perhaps when a firm or other organization is isolated on an issue or when everything else has been tried. None of them would claim to substitute for the technical input that their clients would be able to make to issues, which makes them less valuable to policy making officials than to their clients. It can also be a transient community, with a heavy reliance upon young staff. Contrary to uninformed folklore, there do not appear to be hidden stories of undue influence to be found by studying commercial lobbying (the regulation of EU lobbying is described in Chapter 2). Indeed, there is a lack of serious assessments of how these players contribute to EU interest representation and public policy making, which is surprising given the intrigue they hold for many observers. Until these appear, it is difficult to find reasons as to why public affairs consultancies are seen as germane to an understanding of how the EU works.

Some association management companies have also developed and marketed stand-alone public affairs services alongside their core activities of providing secretariat facilities for associations. Whilst there are a number of players in the market, there are three main providers, of which Ernst & Young are the market leaders, with the ability to offer multiple client services. Some public affairs companies also now provide association management services. These contract services have developed in response to a variety of needs, and to the expertise offered by service providers, and from the entrepreneurship of service providers in initiating new associations. Often, they arise where there is both a need for a collective organization and difficulty in justifying a dedicated

presence in Brussels, where there is low process expertise, or where there has been a change trigger in an existing association, or even where a totally neutral provider is seen by members as the only way forward (Westgeest and Alves, 2002). Consequently, there is a large proportion of associations from outside the Member States among their clients. It is a relatively stable sector, accounting for little more than 5 per cent of EU associations.

The presence of large firms in EU public affairs has made a substantial impact upon the character of EU level groups. Historically, many of these were federations of national associations, and over time a significant number of them have come to admit firms as members alongside national associations as full or associate members, or to found new groups alongside them which only represent large firms. These latter groups have the advantage of fleetness of foot in reaching and acting upon decisions, because they are based around a small number of firms of similar size who are able to act quicker than are national associations with a series of members to consult and satisfy. Because of this exclusivity, they are often able to come to richer positions than are federations. This quality of exclusivity is also their limitation, although there are many in the Commission who believe 'encompassingness' and 'representativity' to be over-rated qualities compared to the ability to deliver fresh thinking and grass roots perspectives for forward looking and policy purposes. These latter qualities have made ERT and the EU Committee valued partners for the Commission in the past. Jacques Delors invited members of the former organization to sit alongside him in press conferences in his drive to achieve the Single European Act (SEA) in the early to mid-1990s, and he once went on French television to describe ERT as his first ally in the development of the single market (Richardson, 1997). In the mid-1990s, Commissioner Bangemann established 'industry round tables' comprising household name large firms to help achieve key strategic initiatives in priority areas such as information technology. Thus the Commission has often found large firms to be important and powerful allies, not just for agenda and policy purposes, or solely to enhance its credibility and legitimacy, but also as political allies acting as agents to influence the thinking and positions of Member States towards European integration.

As Chapter 3 outlines, it is however, possible to over-exaggerate the utility of large firms in comparison to single groups. Large

firms are no more than a select constituency who have grown to develop their own means of EU interest representation, and their main growth period in EU public affairs and impact upon groups has already happened. Some large firms have come to Brussels and gone away again, while those that have come tend to be a select constituency particularly affected by external threats and high transaction costs (Weber and Hallerberg, 2001). Large firms often have different interests from SMEs over issues such as open markets, and cannot respond to policy making needs that require representative input, such as labour market agreements, or the development needs of small firms. Company direct membership of EU associations is a phenomenon of large firms; there are almost no direct firm membership associations geared to membership or representation of other types of firm. It is also possible to over-exaggerate the coherence of firms in comparison to groups, in that multinationals usually have multiple product interests which produce conflicts that can simulate the diversity found in trade associations. Unilever, for instance, recently found that it had 1,600 separate products, and 29 separate EU trade association affiliations. It is not unusual for a company's different product divisions to have conflicting interests. When it becomes aware of this, the company's decentralized structure has difficulty in resolving these or in prioritizing one over another, although there are occasions when the firm is unaware that different divisions are pursuing different public affairs lines. Like some associations, large companies can also be slow to reach decisions. They are not, as they have been treated in some over-enthusiastic accounts, the future of business interest representation, but a segment of it that has already reached maturity. There are too many accounts in the literature which over-exaggerate and over-generalize both the benefits offered by large firms, and the weaknesses of EU trade associations. These sometimes give the impression of an 'either/or' scenario, whereas the reality is that strengths and weaknesses can be found amongst both types of actors, and that together they can have complementary capacities.

Conclusion

These opening salvos have sought to provide a 'flavour' of EU interest representation. It is important to maintain a sense of

boundaries as to what interest representation can, and does, contribute to European integration and public policy making, but also what it does not. Taken as a whole, the EU is neither driven by, nor insulated from, public and private interests, although aspects of it can be either of these. Ideas, interests and the inter-relationship of these factors with institutions are powerful analytic devices with which to understand both how the EU works, and its system of interest representation. Indeed, 'influence' is not a one way street, in that private and public interests are influenced by the EU institutional settings in which they participate, the ideas to which they are exposed, and by past experiences.

Special to the EU is its multi-level context and the way in which this shapes EU interest representation, and the intensity of the dependency of central EU institutions upon outside interests as a whole. As in many Western political systems, private and public interests contribute much to agendas, the framing of issues, contributory thinking, detailed input to drafts, consideration of measures and policy implementation, and legitimacy, political support and opposition. This multi-level context should caution against treating either the EU as a whole as a monolith, behaving and acting as one, or even one of its institutions, such as the Commission, where different departments vary widely in their perspectives. Any European Council meeting, any announcement from the European Central Bank, or indeed simply listening to any EU political figure speak, should remind the reader that EU politics cannot, and should not, be reduced to 'interest group politics'. It is worth repeating that only certain types of cases involving concentrated distributions of costs and benefits result in 'interest group politics' (Wilson, 1995). Typically, 'high politics' dossiers involving matters of wider interest distributions are driven by different kinds of politics involving forces such as public debate, Member States, and political institutions rather than sectional private interests. Hence claims that some of the grand issues of European integration, such as the single market project (commencing with Sandholtz and Zysman, 1989), or Economic and Monetary Union (EMU: van Apeldoorn, 2000), have been driven by organized (big business) interests, should be treated with some caution and a healthy scepticism (Chapter 3).

There are a number of different explanations for the SEA, and the best explanations of it draw on a variety of these, at least

acknowledging the importance of broadly favourable Member States in the process, together with a congruence of historical circumstances. These cast doubt on the pivotal centrality of ERT that some accounts have suggested, whilst acknowledging that the organization did have a role, and perhaps even an important contributory one. In any event, the well-rehearsed story of the influence of the ERT may partly have been the product of exceptional historical circumstances of a very confident, forward marching Commission, together with the attractiveness of the liberalization agenda in member state politics. The organization today enjoys nowhere near the historic influence that it is said to have once had (Chapter 3). As for its central role, and those of other kindred large firm-centred organizations such as the Association for the Monetary Union of Europe (AMUE), in the coming of monetary union, there are even greater grounds for scepticism. These organizations do not feature, or are no more than two footnotes, in mainstream and authoritative accounts of the coming of EMU (see the collections of essays in Crowley, 2002; Jones, 2002; Verdun, 2002). Private interest constituencies, organized or otherwise, did not play a central role in EMU, because monetary union is not the type of issue over which a single interest constituency can dominate.

If this interpretation is correct, it is worth examining whether it qualifies the explanatory power of one of the core tools of analysis of European integration (Chapter 8). Private interests may well have been active on these types of issue, but the grand bargains of European integration are influenced more by open political debate, and resolved in fora in which private interests are no more than background influences. Even in 'high politics' cases involving narrow concentration of costs, such as fisheries and electricity liberalization, the main forces in shaping policy outcomes have not been organized interests, even if these players have been active. Scepticism should also be reserved for claims of the type that a certain individual or organization working outside the EU institutions wrote, or was responsible for, a particular piece of legislation. The uncritical reporting of such claims from interviews with one individual presenting an inflated view of his own role reflects the generally poor state of research methods in some pockets of 'interest group' studies. Provided these contexts are kept in mind, what follows can be of value to the enquiring reader.

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