

## Organized Interests in the EC and the European Parliament

**Beate Kohler-Koch**

European Integration online Papers (EIoP) Vol. 1 (1997) N° 009;  
<http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/1997-009a.htm>

Date of publication in the  : 10.5.1997

Full text

**Keywords**

European Parliament, European polity formation, interest representation, lobbying, political science

**Abstract**

It is a truism that the emergent European polity contributes to the transformation of interest representation in Europe. It is, however, highly contested if a uniform system of interest intermediation is in the making and if so, what will be its shape. Pressures to adapt are quite strong, but national traditions provide strong institutional constraints to European convergence. In addition, the institutional properties of the EU make sure that no single system is likely to emerge. The paper presents theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence to that point. The empirical findings concentrate on the relationship between interest representatives and the European Parliament and are taken from a written survey among MEPs and European Public Affairs Consultants.

**Kurzfassung**

Es ist eine Binsenweisheit, daß die in Entstehung begriffene europäische Polity zur Transformation der Interessensvertretung in Europa beiträgt. Höchst umstritten ist allerdings, ob ein einheitliches System der Interessensvermittlung im Entstehen ist und wenn ja, wie es genau aussehen wird. Anpassungszwänge sind ziemlich stark, doch nationale Traditionen sorgen für starke institutionelle Beschränkungen einer europäischen Konvergenz.

Dieser Artikel beinhaltet zu dieser Frage theoretische Überlegungen und empirische Hinweise. Die empirischen Ergebnisse konzentrieren sich auf die Beziehung zwischen Interessensvertretern und dem Europäischen Parlament und stammen aus einer schriftlichen Umfrage unter den MdEP und professionellen Lobbyisten.

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## 1. Introduction

The focus of interest group research in the European context has slowly shifted over the years from the analysis of how private interests contributed to the process of political integration to investigations about their impact on the patterns of governance within the European Union (EU). This is not just the old and familiar question on influence and pressure but rather a broader view on how the emergent European polity contributes to the evolution of a particular type of interest intermediation and how this in turn shapes the ways and means of policy-making in Europe.

The paper starts from the assumption that the particularities of any system of interest intermediation can still be explained best by the analytical model once developed by Schmitter and Streeck (1981) but that this model has to be adapted to the multilevel system of the EU. Interest groups are intermediate organisations that live in two worlds: one characterized by the „logic of membership“, the other one by the „logic of influence“. The logic of membership is based on the specific characteristics of actors and on the conditions under which actors are constituted and operate. The logic of influence is derived from the institutional and structural determinants of the political system in which interests have to operate.

It is plausible to assume that European integration and in particular the deepening of economic and political Community building since the late eighties has deeply affected the two logics of interest intermediation. Market liberalization, de-regulation and changing regulatory regimes confront economic actors throughout the Community with new challenges and opportunities. Vested interests are at stake and new bargains have to be made in order to unite for collective action. As competences have shifted from the national to the supra-national level, interests have to find access and accommodate to a new and very different political system. It is unique in terms of its institutional set-up, the distribution of powers and responsibilities within the system and in terms of the dominant rules of the game. It is best characterized as a multi-level system of governance in which „authoritative allocation“ - to quote David Easton - is a matter of joint decision-making based on

multi-lateral negotiations.

It is quite evident that there are strong push and pull-factors to adapt to the European system. Interests always turn to where the power is. And the EU has accumulated a considerable amount of institutional competence and of problem-solving capacities. In addition, it decides on the distribution and redistribution of resources by allotting income and subsidies. In short, it is attractive to become part of the game and to have a voice to be heard in European policy-making. At the same time, there are strong pull factors in terms of support given to private interests to get organized at the European level. Among the European institutions, the European Commission has been most prominent to encourage trans-national interest group co-operation, to initiate European-wide networking and to provide benefits like privileged access or financial support. It has done so on an ad hoc basis, but repeatedly and over a long period of time because interest groups can provide goods most needed by Community institutions: expert knowledge and support.

To sum it up: Theory and empiric evidence provide good reasons to expect that with the process of European integration a transformation in the system of European interest intermediation will take place. Market integration and a common supra-national system of decision-making change national environments in a way that they look far more alike than ever before. Though pressures to adapt are quite strong, my hypothesis is that no convergent system of European interest intermediation will emerge. There are two main reasons to support that argument: first, institutional change is path-dependent. There are strong institutional constraints that make sure that any adaptation to the common European environment will be tainted by the colours of the national system. Secondly, the very properties of the EU-system will make sure that no uniform system will come about. To test my hypothesis I will first take a look at those particular features of the European Union that make it plausible that a change in established systems of interest intermediation has to take place. The next step will be to look for evidence with respect to a co-evolution of the EU polity and a European system of interest intermediation. In order to prove my point, I will develop my argument about the likely persistence of a peaceful coexistence of different systems within the Community. Finally I will report findings from an empiric research project still in progress.

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## **2. The European Union: Features of a System Sui-Generis**

A most outstanding feature of the EU-system is the multi-layer structure and the combination of supra-national and inter-governmental elements in decision-making. In the course of the policy-making cycle responsibilities and competences shift and with them actor constellations and the rules of the game. Agenda-setting and policy-formulation are EU affairs, whereas implementation is the sole responsibility of the member states. Even though the responsible level of government may be unequivocal, the distribution of competences between the organs of European decision-making are not. Depending on the subject-matter, decision-making powers are distributed between Community organs in different ways. All this adds up to a highly complex system of governance.

Another key feature of the European system is the high degree of functional segmentation. It is partly the result of the process of European integration. Enlarging the scope of integration was an incremental process that added bits and pieces to the functional responsibilities of the Community. Deepening has always been a matter of negotiation and, therefore, did not follow a strict functional logic which might emerge in a purely functional „spill-over" process. As a consequence, national, supra-national and sometimes sub-national agencies share decision-making powers in one policy-field. The consequence is not close co-operation to assure coherence, but patch-work policies in a highly segmented system. Segmentation has been aggravated by the functional differentiation in

the work of the Council and the Commission, as well. The Council and the working groups of the Council meet in „specialized“ councils. Over time they have developed their own policy philosophies, styles of policy-making, and networks of interests. The same holds true for the European Commission. Despite the fact that the Commission is a collegiate body, the Commission's Directorates have become increasingly autonomous. They have their own functional profile and are closely locked up in well established policy communities. The European Parliament (EP) is a typical working parliament in which functional specific committees have a strong position. Functional segmentation, however, may be less pronounced because the EP has to find a broad consensus most of the time in order to push its point in relation to the Council and the Commission.

The EU is different from the national political systems with regard to its political quality. It is politically underdeveloped in the sense that it lacks the necessary political infrastructure that serve as transmission belts from the public to the political level. There is no European-wide public opinion, no transnational political parties worth that name. Furthermore, the competence of the European Parliament, though directly elected, still is very limited. To gain precedence over competing positions, the debate will not be a political one trying to persuade a broad public. It will rather be based on expert knowledge. Those who command superior information on what is considered to be appropriate and efficient in common problem solving have persuasive power. The Community organs, in particular the European Commission being responsible to initiate policy proposals, disposes of only limited resources and is therefore particularly open to external expert advice. It not only attracts but also organizes a dense network of consultation. In order not to become too dependent on expert knowledge provided by the member states it includes all kinds of private interests in the process of policy formulation.

Last but not least, the EU is a dynamic system under constant change. Apart from the Intergovernmental Conferences that have been convened three times in recent years to decide on deep cutting reforms in the institutional system of the Community, there has been a steady process of incremental change. With transferring more and more responsibilities to the European level, the distribution of legal competence and action capacity between levels of government has changed. This has also affected the distribution of allocating powers between the public and the private, i.e. between authoritative decisions taken by the state and the allocating mechanism of market forces. Furthermore, formal decision-making procedures and the role attributed to the individual European institutions have been altered. And because the EU as a political system is unique, it is an open process of trial and error to find out what kind of decision-making routines will develop and what will be the relative importance of individual institutions in the game.

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It is quite evident that interests have adapted to this new emerging European polity. The growing importance of the EU has led to a huge increase of lobbying in Brussels. This „growing army of Euro-lobbyists“ (Buchan 1992) has not left the national battle fields void. Rather, interest groups have adapted to the multi-layer character of the European system by establishing organizations at all levels, building direct channels of contact to supranational as well as to national political actors, and seeking to get involved in all the relevant national, transnational and supranational networks. They all pursue a „dual strategy“, striving for access and voice in European policy-making through national governments and directly through communications with EU institutions. The combination of multiple channels of access is mandatory, because, in the course of the policy-making cycle, the arena changes from one level of government to the other and because European decision-making still is a mix of intergovernmental and supranational bargaining. It would therefore be a short-sighted strategy just to concentrate on one level or one institution. The resulting omnipresence of interest groups adds to the complexity of the system.

The segmentation of European policy-making has had its effects on the organisation of private interests, too. The specialized individual Directorats General of the Commission have over time established close links to relevant interest groups. The most welcomed partners in such issue-specific networks are sectoral interest groups. Encompassing interest associations find it difficult to deliver in such a system. They neither command the necessary expert knowledge nor the support of their members to become reliable partners in mutual agreements. The proliferation of interest groups with narrow sectoral interests, the mushrooming representation of big companies and public affairs consultants mirror the segmented structure of the EU.

With the high premium put on appropriate problem-solving strategies, influence goes with an interest group's capacity to provide what is most needed: technical expert knowledge, assessment of political response and support in implementing chosen policies. This gives a greater say to interests that can live up to the needs of a technocracy than those that rely on grass root mobilization and public opinion.

To sum it up: The institutional characteristics of the EU system have put high pressure on the organisation of interest representation to adapt to the new system. It shares the complexity of the political system, mirrors its highly segmented and multi-level structure and by doing so is bound to reinforce existing features of the EU polity and to aggravate its weaknesses.

### **3. One or many systems of European interest intermediation?**

Nevertheless, I claim that no uniform European system of interest intermediation will develop. Though there might be some outstanding characteristics like the dominance of producer interests and the segmentation and complexity of the system, it is highly unlikely that a convergent European system of interest intermediation will emerge. This is a view contrary to mainstream arguments. Some authors (Andersen and Eliassen, 1991) consider it reasonable to predict that a more structured system with stronger corporatist elements will evolve. Others (Mazey and Richardson, 1993a) predict that it is likely that policy-making within the EC, though still sectorally structured, will become more „manageable“. They argue that the Europeanization of the policy process will trigger processes of adaptation which will lessen the cross-national differences in interest intermediation, that the increase in interest representation will put pressure on the European policy-makers to introduce some form of institutionalization so as to make it more manageable, and that the „European Polity“ model which is based on patterns of co-option, will gain strength (Mazey and Richardson, 1993a).

Schmitter/Streeck (1991) have been most outspoken predicting a transformation from „national corporatism to transnational pluralism“. Recently, the opposite argument has been presented by Gerda Falkner (1997) who claims that the predicted decline in neo-corporatist interest intermediation is premature and that at the national as well as at the European level encompassing negotiations between both sides of industry and the Commission as the representative of the European „state“ are gaining ground. Her argument, in a nut shell, is that there will be more rather than less convergence in European interest intermediation.

I would agree with Schmitter/Streeck that at least for the time being European politics will be far more pluralist in nature than what we have been used to in most of the member states. It is just because of the well-known properties of the European polity that a corporatist system is unlikely to emerge. In such a fragmented, multi-level system in which binding decisions are dependent on intergovernmental negotiations as much as on inter-institutional bargaining there is no „strong state“

on which any corporatist system is based. And just because there is no authoritative decision-making centre at the top that has the coercive resources to turn negotiated agreements with autonomous social groups into binding decisions, interests will not fuse into encompassing powerful associations. The system will be pluralist in the sense of being „organizationally fragmented, less hierarchically integrated, and more internally competitive" (Schmitter/Streeck 1991:49). To equate these findings with an ideal type description of the European system of interest representation is, however, missing the point. Whenever the debate on the likely future of European interest intermediation turns to a holistic approach, trying to characterize the „system as such", the „specifica differentiae" of the EU polity tend to get neglected. (Neo)corporatism as well as pluralism are concepts rooted in an understanding of state - society relation that are intricately linked to the nation state. The European Union is no such state and it is highly unlikely that it will acquire its most prominent features in the coming future. To understand what are the characteristics of the European system and what kind of governance patterns will be dominant in the European context, we have to look for a new conceptional framework that goes beyond our traditional models of the democratic nation state (Jachtenfuchs/Kohler-Koch 1996a; Kohler-Koch 1996).

The renewed debate about interest groups and, in particular, empiric research on European interest representation has demonstrated that there is no clear single pattern throughout the different issue areas and within the different institutional domains of the EU. And it is highly unlikely that an all embracing pattern will emerge. I base my argument on two reasons. One is about path dependence and the formative power of national institutions as an intervening variable. The other is directly related to institutional characteristics of the EU polity.

Institutional transformation is always path-dependent. In the European context this is particularly relevant because institutional adaption affects an established European, i.e. supra-national system and the individual national systems at the same time. In Europe there is a wide variety in the patterns of interest organisation, the policy routines of intermediating between public and private interests, and the shared beliefs about what constitutes appropriate ways and means of interest representation and what should be considered fair and effective when dealing with partial interests. Institutions are stubborn to change. This is particularly the case in European integration because national systems will not become obsolete even though European policies gain importance. Organizing interests at the European level can not be detached from what is happening at the national level. To associate with like-minded groups across borders is difficult not just because of the high transaction costs. More importantly, borders contain and stabilize integrated national systems. Interests cannot associate freely; they are bound by the legal and institutional setting which they inhabit. Each European organization has to devise its own optimal strategy to cope with the disruptive effects in the national environments produced by more intense European co-operation. It has to take into account the conditioning effects of established institutional systems and practices of interest intermediation, of traditional modes of behaviour, and of the accumulated capital of mutual trust in and experience with existing relationships among its members. Therefore it does not follow that the growing importance of European integration will produce a common European system. On the contrary, institutional transformations remain dependent on the persistence of national institutional constellations. The future is path-dependent in the sense that the process of Europeanization will take different shapes and create different types of entities. The complexity of the system, therefore, will not vanish with the progress of integration.

The other reason is that the very characteristics of the institutional setting of the EU runs counter to any uniform system of interest intermediation. The power of institutions is not restricted to shape the „logic of influence" in terms of just providing channels of access and putting different weights on resources to be exchanged. Institutions offer constitutive and regulative rules that contribute to the very constitution of actors, prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activities and shape expectations (Keohane 1989:3). To take an institutionalist point of view (March/Olson 1984; 1995) it is important not only to take the constitutive and regulative function of norms and rules seriously but also to take

into account the predominant norm orientation and self-understanding of the actors involved. Institutions give direction and the way they do it matches in different ways with the specific properties of the interests concerned and the social and political context they live in.

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## 4. European Interests and the European Parliament

To test the theoretical assumptions on the relative weight of the institutional factors for the structuring of interest intermediation we have started a research project focussing on the European Parliament(1). Our main interest has been twofold: First, we wanted to know whether different sub-systems of interest-intermediation are evolving and what match of institutional, issue and actor characteristics influence that evolution. Secondly, we were interested to what extent the institutional setting of the EP and its changing role in European policy-making does affect the relations it has with interest groups, the benefits it can gain and the challenges it encounters. Both sides have been asked in order to get a fair picture of interactions taking place, the strategies applied and the influence exerted by interest groups.

We started from the assumption that three ideal types of sub-systems of interest intermediation may be found

1. close policy communities that might either turn into iron triangles or just stay marginalized coalitions of the weak;
2. loose networks linking actors and institutions across national, political and issue boundaries that may start as weak links but may develop into strong ties;
3. a pluralist setting of interest representation with professional ad hoc lobbying which may turn out to be mutually beneficial or be to the detriment of political interest representation by the European Parliament.

The hypotheses that it is mainly the institutional characteristics of the political system that determine the patterns and structures of interest intermediation points first of all to the distribution of the decision-making powers within the EU. Following this institutional argument, the developing multi-level and „sui generis" character of the EC and the institutional dynamic since the Single European Act 1986 will have consequences for interest intermediation and the attention lobbyists pay to the institutions in Brussels. Until the Single European Act, Commission and Council have been the decisive EC-actors in the decision-making process. Therefore they have been the main target groups for lobbying, while the EP has had only advisory competences and did not influence politics at all. As a consequence, interest groups have not been very active in their efforts to open new channels of influence to the members of the EP.

Studies analysing the new legislative procedures and competences of the EP come to the conclusion that there is a significant or even dramatic change in the role of the EP since the Single European Act (Corbett 1989, Fitzmaurice 1988, Gardner 1991). The introduction of the co-operation procedure with SEA influences the policy-making process of the EC-institutions. The co-operation procedure definitely offers the EP real legislative competences and the Council has to take into consideration the position of the EP. The procedure changes the role of the Commission, too. The Commission with its gatekeeper function has to consider the reaction of Council and of the EP. As a consequence, the Commission „sits uneasily between the Council and Parliament" (Fitzmaurice 1988: 398). The Commission and the EP become partners as well as rivals in the European policy-making process (Westlake 1994).

As a consequence of the new legislative procedures, the EP attracts more and more attention from lobbyists. Due to the fact that the EP in its self-understanding is the legitimate representative of European public this growing interest is highly welcome and offers the possibility to increase transparency and the democratic legitimacy of the EP. The increase of interest representatives at the EP has even increased since the Maastricht Treaty. With this treaty a new co-decision procedure is introduced strengthening the institutional role of the EP in the decision-making process once again. This procedure, which has been in operation since the end of 1993, gives the EP the final possibility to reject a proposal. The Council is now no longer capable to overrule the EP so that the procedure is „a remarkable step forward" (Westlake 1994: 146, see also Earnshaw/Judge 1995:625).

According to the new role of the EP as an important institution in the European decision-making process, the Parliamentarians are becoming a decisive target group for lobbyists and lobbyists have to cope with the institutional structure, the procedures and the policy style within the Parliament.

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The increasing impact of the EP can be shown not only by the fact of the growing number of interest representatives lobbying the EP, but also in detailed case studies (Judge 1992, Judge/Earnshaw/Cowan 1994). Although the studies do not offer a coherent picture, because the „EP can display divergent patterns of influence across policy sectors, and often within the same policy area, as well as across time, or even in the same time period" (Judge/Earnshaw/Cowan 1994: 28), there is a evidence that the EP has become a decisive element in the European decision-making process. This is particularly true for environmental, social and consumer interests where the EP is an ally for groups having no other access to the decision-making process of the EU. „Weak" interest groups from the issue areas of low-politics can form alliances with the EP because the EP is eager to take up those issues which attract a lot of public attention and where the EP can show itself as the „real" representative of the European public and as the democratic and legitimate element representing not capitalist but consumer interests (Mazey/Richardson 1993a: 12). The EP is dependent on the external support of the European public to strengthen its own role in the distribution of decision-making powers. As a consequence, for weak interest groups lobbying the EP is an indirect strategy to cope with their limited resources. Their final target for having success is not the EP: „you don't lobby the EP - you lobby the Commission and Council via Parliament" (Baker 1992: 9).

The corporate identity of the EP to represent European public is reflected in the structural openness of MEPs towards lobbying. The Parliamentarians act as individual members. Due to the weak leading structures within the Political Groups their independence is rather high. At the same time, they are under severe pressure of time. They have to travel between Strasbourg, Brussels and their home countries. They have to keep in contact with their political base at home, have to attend plenary sessions and meetings with the Political Groups and the Committees. The Parliamentarians are not well staffed, they have to rely on other sources of information. Furthermore, they can not always assess which proposal of the Commission will have implications for their constituency. As a consequence, they have to be open to lobbying.

In conclusion, the EP can no longer be considered as a weak parliament. The rhetorical question of van Schendelen (1993), whether the EP is a parliament at all, can be answered unambiguously. In the institutional framework of the EC, the Parliament is not only an additional player in the decision-making process changing the power distribution between leading Commission and Council, but the EP also contributes to a change in the rules of the game leading to different practices of lobbying and to different roles of the actors (Kohler-Koch 1996a: 201-203). The Commission and the EP are no longer allies representing European interests. They become more and more rivals in their



quest for legitimacy and democratic representation (Westlake 1994). But not only the balance in the institutional framework is changing, the relations between interest representatives and the members of the EP have to be reinterpreted, too. This can be seen in the following by our preliminary results of our empirical study.

As to the relevance of the institutional factor we were interested to get a more valid assessment of the kind of institutional characteristics that are of importance. It is the position of the EP itself within the institutional set-up of the EU or rather institutional properties of the EP that may be shaped by external conditions like electoral laws or international organisational structures and rulings? A competing hypothesis would be that it is the issue at stake that makes a difference. The traditional distinction between „high" and „low" politics rests on the assumption that the influence of the EP on European policies and also the attractiveness it has for interest groups varies depending on the content of a policy: Matters that are highly technical call for the expert who will be difficult to find among Parliamentarians. Matters of general political interest that range high on the public agenda are a formidable battle ground for politicians and a good opportunity for the EP to gain profile in the public debate. Is the assumption that the EP acts as a natural ally of environmental, consumer, and human rights groups shared by MEPs and interest representatives? The issues of the weak are supposed to find little attention in the daily business of the Economic Community. Do the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) support the idea that social movements should have a greater say and that the EP should give voice to what deserves broad public attention? It is an empirical question whether the differentiation between technical and political issues is of any relevance and what kind of interests - from a Parliamentarian's and a lobbyist's point of view - should have a greater say in European affairs.

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An aspect that up to now has gained little attention is the effect national political cultures and party allegiance has on the normative orientations and the daily routines of Parliamentarians when dealing with organized interests. Especially in a parliament in which party groups have a loose structure, last but not least because there are no European parties to ensure political cohesion, it is plausible to assume that their heterogeneous national composition matters.

## **5. Policy Communities, Networks and Pressure Group Politics**

The European Community is the most likely actor to attract interests on a long time basis and to form close policy communities. There are three reasons why such policy communities are likely to emerge: First of all, the deep segmentation of the policy process within the Commission and the highly specialized subject matters promote the close co-operation of a limited number of experts. In addition, because the formulation of a Commission's proposal and the subsequent negotiations within the working groups of the Council usually take an extended period of time not only a close but continuous interaction takes place that is bound to create the kind of trust and familiarity needed to form a close community.

The European Parliament is on the margin of that process. There are, however, issue areas where Members of Parliament are considered to be the natural ally of an advocacy coalition and become members of a policy community. Environment, consumer protection and social affairs are the most prominent areas. In our empiric research we did not cover the European Commission, therefore we will refrain from making any general statements. Our investigations about the relations between interest groups and the European Parliament provide a lot of evidence that there are close and steady relations between both sides that have the characteristics of „advocacy coalitions" (Sabatier). Environmental groups always point to the openness of MEPs and the support they get in particular on

part of the „Greens". This comes as no surprise because they share similar convictions, have parallel interests, namely the promotion of ecological issues, concentrate their efforts on environmental affairs and are close to the same political milieu.

But what about the relevance of such a policy community? In our judgement it is a „coalition of the weak" which is born out of the weakness of both sides. Members of the „Greens" within the EP are the most favourite address of environmental movements for two reasons: One is that those movements lack the resources to get engaged in what they themselves consider to be professional lobbying. This would entail getting into contact with those Members of the EP who are important and are less inclined to share their views, i.e. members of the conservative party groups and the liberals (ED, PPE, LDR). They also regret that they have neither the financial nor the staff resources to ensure a continuous monitoring and to get their own information about the course of the debate within Parliament. Their reliance on their close contacts to members of the „Greens" is born out of a lack of promising alternatives.

The other reason that explains very well the close relationship between segments of the EP and particular social movements is based on two political cleavages. The most obvious cleavage is on the different value attached to issues such as the environment, animal protection, etc. Less in the open is yet another cleavage. It is about the appropriate way to do politics. Most Members of the EP have internalized that European policy-making is a matter of interbureaucratic bargaining. The rules of the game are framed in what is considered to be appropriate: legitimizing a policy position by referring to the technical appropriateness of the strategy suggested, its beneficial economic effects, and the need to balance national (or any other vested) interests. Negotiating is about striking bargains on package deals and long-term reciprocity among reliable partners. To politicise an issue means to let it get out of control. To mobilize public opinion is to get emotions and value judgements involved which may make it difficult to find a compromise. This just is not in line with the dominant style of policy-making within the Community and it is not to the liking of the majority of Parliamentarians, either. Just because the EP has a greater say in European affairs when it is united, any controversies that might provoke deep cutting conflicts along party lines are avoided. Grass root movements find it difficult to adapt to these rules of the game. Their preferred strategies, however, meet with strong reservation. In the mid-90s animal welfare got a very poor reputation among MEPs because their style of lobbying was considered to be „nerve wrecking" as one Parliamentarian put it. Sending thousands of letters to the EP and monitoring closely voting behaviour was not the kind of „friendly relation" MEPs would like to entertain with interest groups. Therefore, it is no surprise that key persons in the Commission and the EP rather deal with representatives of the ecological movement, consumer protection, etc. that are socialized to the unwritten code of conduct. This holds true for the networks of ecology research institutes that provide expert knowledge and restrict their interventions to presenting arguments.

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Nevertheless, there are cases when a close advocacy coalition between MEPs and lobbying groups representing social movements functioned very well. This happens whenever a close co-operation can be established between an interest group and the rapporteur of the EP's committee in charge. Being very close to an interest group is not considered to be acceptable when the external partner is from industry. It gives weight to the rapporteur's position when it is a social movement with broad public support.(2)

Networks within Parliament are hardly developed when voting behaviour is determined by party group membership and when party groups are coherent and strong. The EP in this aspect is closer to the American Congress than to Westminster or the German Bundestag. Therefore, it is no surprise

that the EP has invented institutions that are closer to the American model. One of the most prominent one are the „intergroups". In an informal setting Parliamentarians belonging to different party groups meet to get informed and talk about particular issue areas. Some of them are closely linked to policy decisions under discussions, other cover a broader field and exist over a longer period of time. Interests are present all of the time. They may host the meetings, give lectures, provide information or just take part as discussants. Some of the intergroups have obviously been initiated and/or are sponsored by interest groups. It is difficult to even find out their number and even more so to assess their importance. They have been mushrooming in recent years, but because they meet irregularly, have a different format as to membership and organization it is hard to make general judgements.(3)

Because of our own research we can say more about the relations between the EP and interest representatives in traditional lobbying.(4) There is a shared view of the growing importance of the EP in EU policy-making. Thus, it is no surprise that attention paid to the EP since the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht has increased considerably.(5) Interest groups of all sorts try to contact the EP. Apart from the different patterns that have evolved - and which will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter - it is quite obvious that the EP now is part of the professional lobbying of any group that tries to make its voice heard in EU politics.

Consultants are perhaps the best indicator to learn if this kind of professional lobbying turns to a more pluralist and American-like pattern. The question to be raised is whether consultants are a passing and part time phenomenon or not.

Is the role of consultants just „to fill gaps not covered by international staff" (MacMillan 1991: 23) or are they the main protagonists of an emerging new system of European interest representation? „Filling gaps" would attribute consultants the role of a substitute, a reserve power for any company or interest group that has to get involved in European affairs only from time to time or that is affected by an issue area outside its dominant realm of interests. Considering the uneven expansion of EU competences consultants could level out temporary gaps in the supply and demand of sectoral interest organisation. The underlying assumption of such an argument is that after some time those affected by EU-decisions will have sorted out whether they consider it worth-while to get organised themselves or not. The sudden rise of public affairs consulting, therefore, should rather be considered as a passing phenomenon.

From an opposite point of view it is suggested that in the future consultants will play a major role in EU interest intermediation. Their growth would be part of the institutional evolution taking place in Europe (Eising/Kohler-Koch 1994). The first argument refers to the very nature of the political system of the EU. The multi-level, fragmented and therefore extremely complex character of European policy-making will increase the demand for agents with specific qualifications: The generalist with high intellectual abilities, a practical knowledge of the implicit rules of the game, and social competence to be able to move with ease in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment. He is accustomed to working in a flexible organisational context and to gain and trade the good most needed in European decision-making, that is expert knowledge.

It is open to further research which type of actor and which patterns of interest intermediation will be dominant in European politics. With the present knowledge the picture we can draw is just a rough and most probably incomplete one.

## 6. The European Parliament in a Multi-Level, Multi-Actor

## Environment

There is abundant evidence that constitutional rules matter. Parliamentarians and interest representatives alike share the belief that the Single European Act and in particular the Treaty of Maastricht has increased the political weight of the EP considerably. Only the „old hats" among the Parliamentarians consider this to be a too narrow view. In their estimation the EP had gained influence already before any treaty revisions were agreed thanks to a number of formal and informal agreements with the Commission and the Council(6).

In addition, Treaty provisions frame the participants perception of the role of the EP in European policy-making, the timing of interest representation and the kind of actors to be contacted. There is a broad agreement that the political weight, and accordingly the attention of interest groups will vary depending on the different legislative procedures.(7) It is the experience of MEPs that the codecision procedure receives the highest attention of interest groups whereas the consultation procedure is more or less neglected.

When asked about the most relevant functions of the EP, there is a striking difference between the attitudes concerning functions and the assessment of how the EP can best exert influence. The classical parliamentary functions range at the top: controlling the Commission, representing the European public, legislation. Agenda setting, the prerogative of the Commission and relations with the Council range low. With the new legislative procedure introduced by the Maastricht Treaty, the EP gained weight in relation to the Council. The Council has to take the Parliament's position into serious consideration. This „institutional challenge" of the Council (Miller 1995) requires a re-balancing between Council and the EP that has most obviously not yet taken place.

### Figure 1: „Question 4: Function of the EP"

As to the question how the EP can best influence European policies, it is again the Council that is considered to be out of reach for the Parliament. It is interesting to note, however, that interest representatives (in particular public affairs consultants) rate the EPs capacity to do business with the Council much higher. Consultations and negotiations with the Commission are on top of the list of Parliamentarians and interest representatives. But when it comes to mobilize public opinion in order to exert pressure on policy decisions, MEPs are even more sceptical than interest representatives.

### Figure 2: „Ways to Exert Influence on the European Policy-making"

This is in line with the assessment MEPs have with regard to what role they should and do play in European politics. They do not only claim to give voice to the general public but also that they are best equipped to make sure that appropriate decisions are taken. Accordingly, they are convinced that their influence does not vary markedly depending on whether the issue at stake is regarded to be technical by nature or of general public interest. Consultants share the opposite, traditional view which attributes considerably less influence to the EP in technical matters.

### Figure 3: „Influence of the EP in different issue areas"

The timing of interest representation is dominated by the procedural rules of EU decision-making. Timing is considered to be most essential for successful performance. Any handbook on lobbying gives advice that contacts have to be made as early as possible. In view of the European policy-making process this would be at the stage of agenda setting and definitely before the Commission submits the formal proposal to the EP.(8) However, at that stage the Commission is the most important actor and therefore attracts all the attention. The EP comes into focus as soon as the rapporteur of the responsible parliamentary committee starts to write the report and the discussion starts within the committees and the individual party groups.

#### Figure 4: „The Timing of Making Contacts"

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Who are the most important people to be met in the EP? The rapporteur and the chairman of the committee are considered to be the main gatekeepers in the formation of the opinion of the Parliament. The position within a committee is even more important than the position of a Parliamentarian within a political group and his or her general reputation within the EP. Personal acquaintance, nationality or political affiliation which might influence the accessibility and openness of Parliamentarians rank comparatively low. The same logic dominates the ranking of the EP's staff. Assistants, the secretariat of the individual political groups or the EP's scientific services are considered to be far less important. Consultants give preference to staff people close to the political groups, individual MEP, in particular the rapporteur and to the secretary of a Committee. Hardly any attention is paid to the experts of the EP's administration.

Consultants and MEPs agree that it is most efficient to meet a Parliamentarian in person. Consultants are professionals, that explains why letters are not their favoured instrument of doing business. The average MEPs, however, receives most of the requests for help and support by letter.

#### Figure 5: „How to approach MEPs best"

By experience consultants find it most effective to approach MEPs directly on issues of particular interest<sup>(9)</sup> and to furnish them with propositions for amendments and position papers to directives under discussion. The clear preference given to this direct ad hoc approach rather than having regular contacts with committee members and providing them with background information on a continuous basis<sup>(10)</sup> clearly indicates that consulting is policy oriented and that consultants have a limited time budget. Consultants are even more sceptical when it comes to hearings and the majority of them does not pay any attention to press conferences, even on controversial issues. On all those points Members of Parliament would agree.

The overall picture produced by our surveys and interviews is that there is a smooth working relationship between MEPs and interest group representatives. Both parties, however, are confronted with odds like a multitude of languages, different working places, legal restrictions and the like. Both parties consider it to more than a nuisance that there are four working places for a Member of the EP: Meetings take place and office work has to be done at Brussels, Strasbourg, Luxembourg. Last but not least, the Parliamentarian has to keep in contact with his or her home constituency and party organization. Both parties consider this to be more than a nuisance. Monitoring becomes a time consuming job of traveling. From a consultant's point of view the access to Parliament is aggravated by bureaucratic restrictions concerning the publication of documents and the EP's „chaotic organisation" as one respondent called it. The multitude of languages obviously is a minor problem and a matter both sides have got used to.

#### Figure 6: „Obstacles to be met"

When compared to other European institutions consultants declare that the EP is about as open as the Commission. Access to the Council is far more difficult for both consultants and Parliamentarians alike.

A competing hypothesis to the institutional one is that behaviour and strategic activities are framed by attitudes that reflect national cultures and/or ideological inclinations going along with party

membership. When asking public affairs consultants, most of them (81%) are well aware that they have to face diverse acceptance in the EP and they attribute this to reservations based on national culture and in particular on political allegiance. Their hit list of „friendly" parties and nations comes pretty close to the reservations Members of Parliament have when asked about their attitude towards lobbying. There is a clear North-South divide with conservative and liberal parties more open for private interest group lobbying than social democratic and green parties.

Table 1: „Acceptance of Consultants by Nationalities"

Figure 8: „Acceptance by the Political Parties" (11)

Members of the European Parliament on the average are very open and consider interest representation to be a matter of mutual benefit. It will come as no surprise that consultants more often than Parliamentarians „completely agree" with the statement that „MEPs often benefit from the expert knowledge of interest representatives". It is noteworthy, however, that on the average this view is highly accepted even among European Parliamentarians(12).

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11

Nevertheless, there is a clear national bias when it comes to the kind of interest representatives that are met and appreciated. All MEPs see an increase in the activities of consultants.(13) It is significant that most of those MEPs that are having often contacts are British MEPs. When talking to Members of Parliament it becomes even more obvious that national experience and attitudes on what interest representation should be about colours the attitude on consultants. Professional lobbying by public affairs consultants is well known in Britain but less so in the Latin countries and Germany. Among those consultants have a bad reputation of being too „pushy", and because they do not represent an interest on their own they are not considered to be an actor a Parliamentarian should rely on and be included in the personal network. Therefore, it is no surprise that consultants range low in the average assessment of which kind of interest representation should get more attention. It is interesting to note that not all those organizations MEPs consider to be important have regular contacts with the European Parliamentarians. Trade Unions and political parties are among those that are in high esteem among Parliamentarians but are not present. This can be read as a confirmation of what is said in general about the structural impediments to mobilize broad interests deeply rooted in national cultures (Kohler-Koch 1994: 169).

Figure 9: „Question 1: Assessment of organizations"

Figure 10: „Question 2: Frequency of contacts of MEPs"

When asked about the preferred sources of information in order to best evaluate interest positions on a given policy issue, MEPs give preference to those that either represent a broad constituency like trade unions, social movements or political parties or can provide them with an aggregated view on the most efficient ways to deal with the problems and economic consequences entailed.

Figure 11: „Question 7: Preferred sources for the position of interest representatives"

Expert knowledge is, indeed, the most important factor for MEPs. The support they may provide for grass root activities or the aggregation of divergent interests are of less importance.

Figure 12: "Question 11: Benefit of interest groups"

Though there is such a clear national profile when it comes to evaluating the benefits of lobbying and the need to keep it under control, nationality is irrelevant when it comes to choosing between different sources of information.

Figure 13: "Question 10: Aspects influencing the choice between different sources of information"

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12

Consultants confirm this approach. When talking to consultants, MEPs are mainly interested to get an assessment of the consequences of the European policy under consideration. Technical expertise comes second, closely followed by economic expert knowledge and advice on possible effects on public opinion. The overwhelming majority of the respondents claimed that „policy assessment" is the kind of information which is always (40%) or at least most of the time (54%) requested by MEPs.

It has to be remembered, however, that interest representatives are but one source of information among several ones and they are not the preferred one. To get information, MEPs often fall back upon the services of the EP and the Commission. It is obvious that these sources of information are considered to be objective and to represent not only particular interests.

Figure 14: "Question 6: Preferred sources of information"

The relative high reliance on information coming from national governments is an indication that MEPs are quite aware of the multi-level character of the EU. This becomes even more obvious when we take a closer look at the kind of interest associations MEPs are used to be in contact with. At first sight European associations range top. About as many MEPs say that they have „most contacts" with European associations (47,9%) as with national ones (45,7%). When adding „most" and „second most" contacts, national associations take the lead.

Table 2: „Contacts with Associations"

## Conclusions

Though this paper only gives the preliminary evaluation of an on-going research project, I hope that it contributes to strengthening the two basic hypothesis. The first one is that even with the deepening of the European integration we will not encounter the evolution of a uniform European system of interest intermediation. The second is that once again we find hard evidence that „institutions matter". The particularities of the EU polity, the institutional structure of the EP and, last but not least the constraining forces of national institutions explain a lot about how interest representation is organized and what its effects are. Nevertheless, institutional variations are just one variable. The institutional properties of a given polity matches in different ways the needs and capacities of actors. The formation of policy communities can not be explained just by looking at the institutional settings. They are built on shared interests in a particular subject matter and shared preferences for what is considered to be an adequate solution to a given political problem. Institutions give direction and provide opportunities, but they are embedded in structures of meaning. The latter is an aspect that still needs even more empiric research.(14)

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## Endnotes

(\*) Paper prepared for the Colloque „Pluralisme, Lobbyisme et Construction Européenne“, March 20-22, 1997 in Brussels. This is a draft: comments are most welcome!

(1) The investigation entails a written survey on Members of Parliament, European Public Affairs Consultants, European Business Associations and other interest groups (still in progress), American and Japanese companies. In addition, several case-studies on different policy issues have been completed.

(2) Case studies cover the reform of the cosmetics directive and several directives concerning pollution.

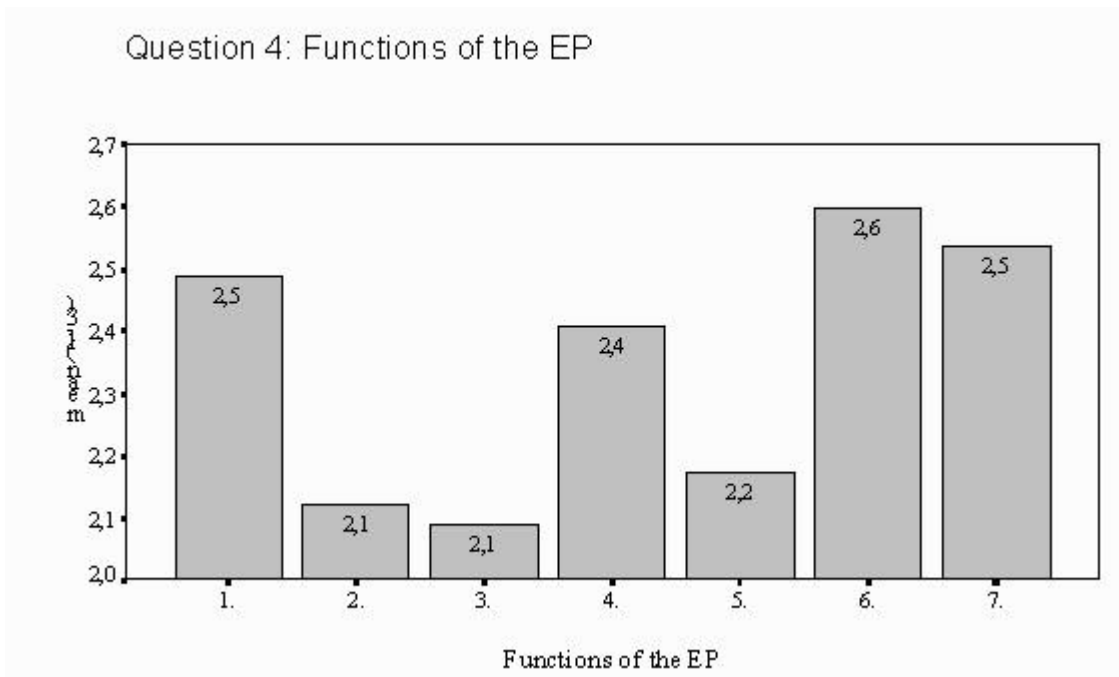
(3) I would like to go on with further investigations on the issue before drawing any conclusions.

- (4) The following findings are based on a written survey of MEPs (Kohler-Koch/Schaber 1996) and European Public Affairs Consultants (Kohler-Koch 1997).
- (5) Two thirds of MEPs and three quarters of consultants agree on that point.
- (6) These conclusions are drawn from interviews with MEPs in early 1996 and the written survey in 1995/96.
- (7) 85% of the consultants agree that the attention that they pay to the EP differs according to what legislative procedure is applied.
- (8) Consultants and MEPs agree very much on timing. Except that MEPs still consider it worthwhile to intervene when a Commission proposal has already reached the stage of discussion in the plenary session of the EP, whereas consultants give this time the lowest priority. Both discard the stage of „agenda setting" and the time before the Commission submits a proposal.
- (9) Two thirds of the respondents consider it to be „very useful".
- (10) Less than a third of the respondents consider this way of providing information „very important".
- (11) Because party groups in the EP differ in their national composition, the distribution of the three groups within each party group is indicated.
- (12) On a scale ranging from 1 to 6 the medium value for MEP is 4.2. and for consultants 5.2.
- (13) Only 11% say that they have never been contacted by consultants, 61% have sometimes and 26% have often contacts with consultants.
- (14) For a more elaborate development of the theoretical argument see my contribution in Wallace/Young (Kohler-Koch 1997a).

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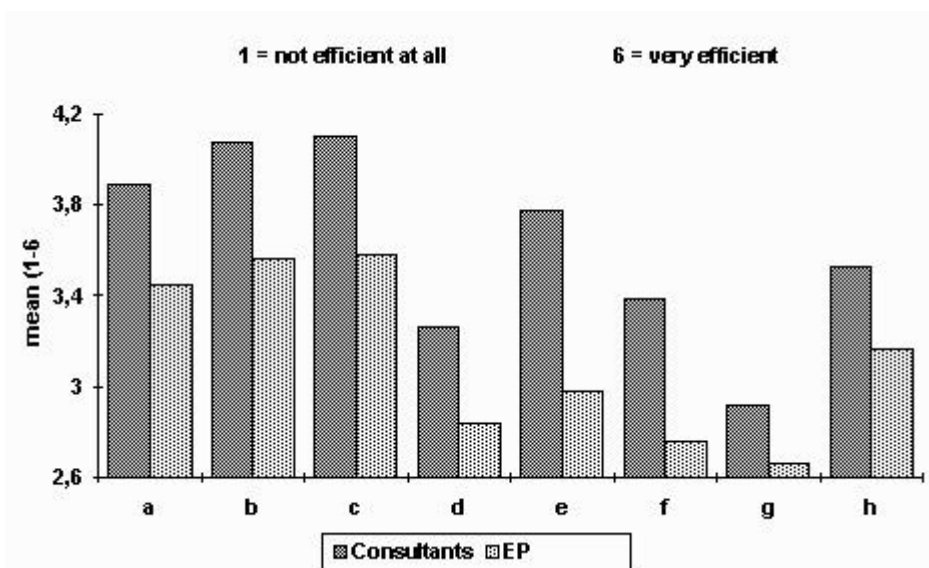
# Figure 1



1. legislative powers
2. agenda-setting
3. consultation with the Council
4. consultation with the Commission
5. parliamentary control of Council
6. parliamentary control of Commission
7. representation of European public

# Figure 2

## Ways to Exert Influence on the European Policy-making



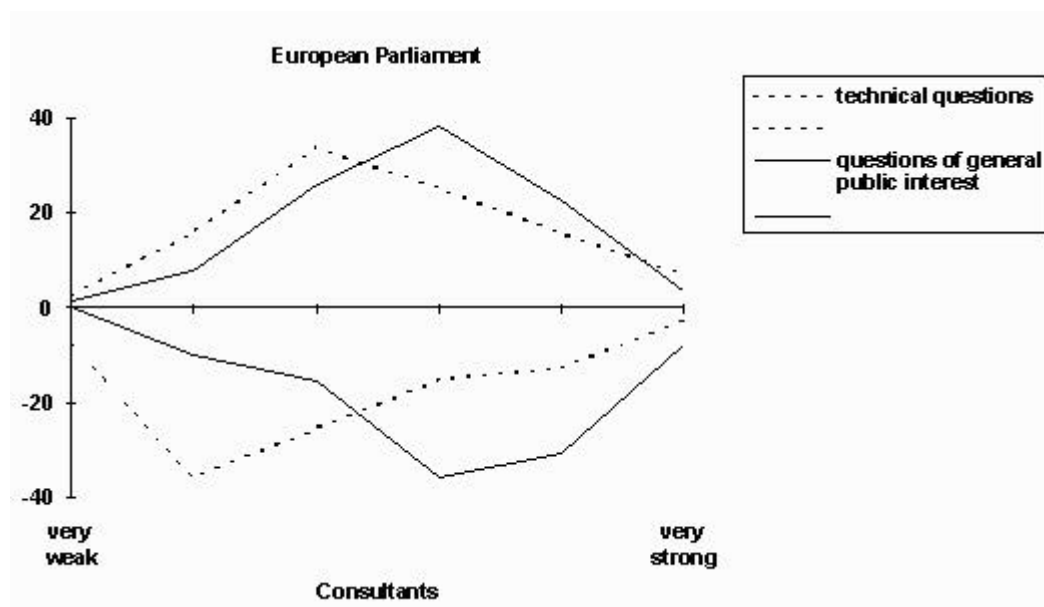
## I.2

The EP/MEP can exert influence best by

- a giving its opinion to proposals of the Commission
- b informal contacts/consultations with the Commission before the proposal is submitted to the EP
- c informal contacts/consultations with the Commission when a proposal is discussed in the EP
- d informal contacts/consultations after the EP has voted on the proposal
- e informal contacts/consultations with the Council when a proposal is discussed in the EP
- f informal contacts/consultations with the Council after the EP has voted on the proposal
- g contacts with national parliaments
- h activities to mobilize public opinion

## **Figure 3**

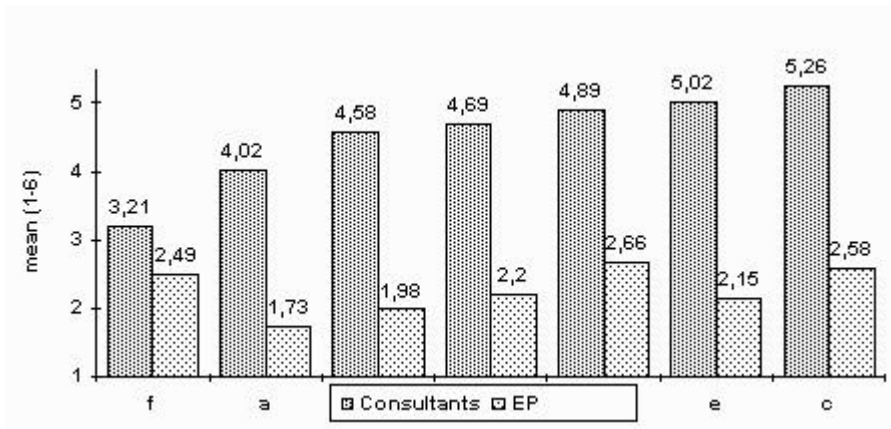
### **Influence of the EP in different issue areas**



## I.3

## **Figure 4**

### **The Timing of Making Contacts**

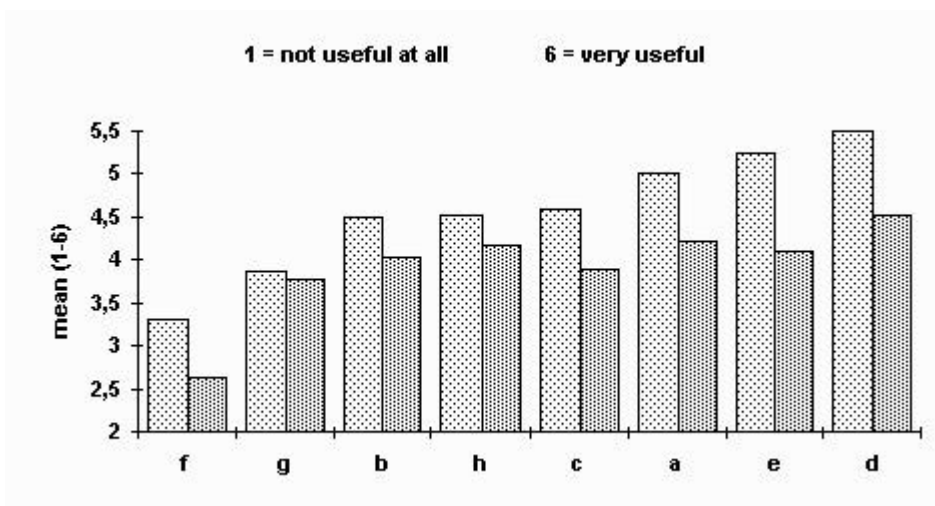


## II.4

- a at the stage of agenda setting
- b before the Commission submits a proposal to the EP
- c when the rapporteur writes his/her report
- d during the discussion in the Committees
- e during the discussion in the political group
- f during the plenary sessions of the EP
- g during the consultation of the EP with the Council and the Commission

## Figure 5

### How to approach MEPs best

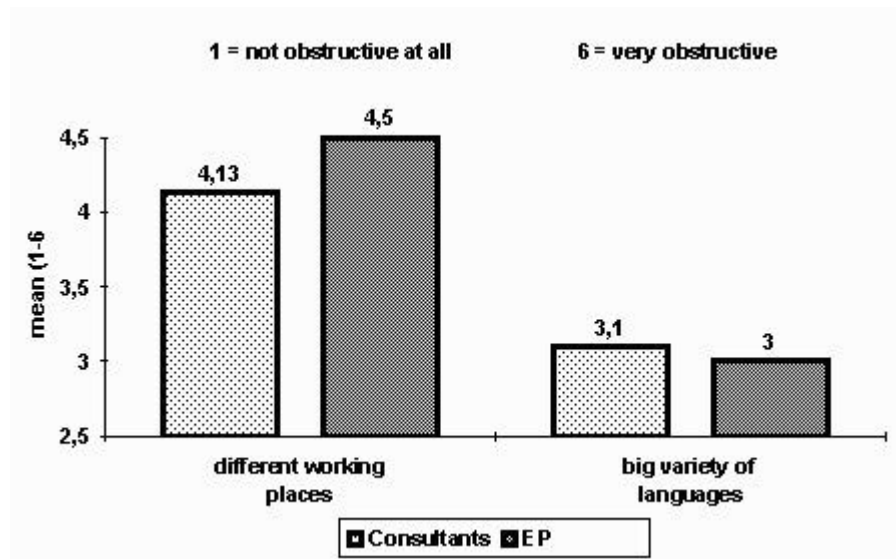


## II. 11

- a position papers
- b regular background information
- c regular contacts to Committee members
- d approaching MEPs directly on issues of particular interests
- e propositions for amendments to directives under discussion
- f press conferences on controversial issues
- g taking part in hearings
- h providing scientific information

## Figure 6

### Obstacles to be met



II.13

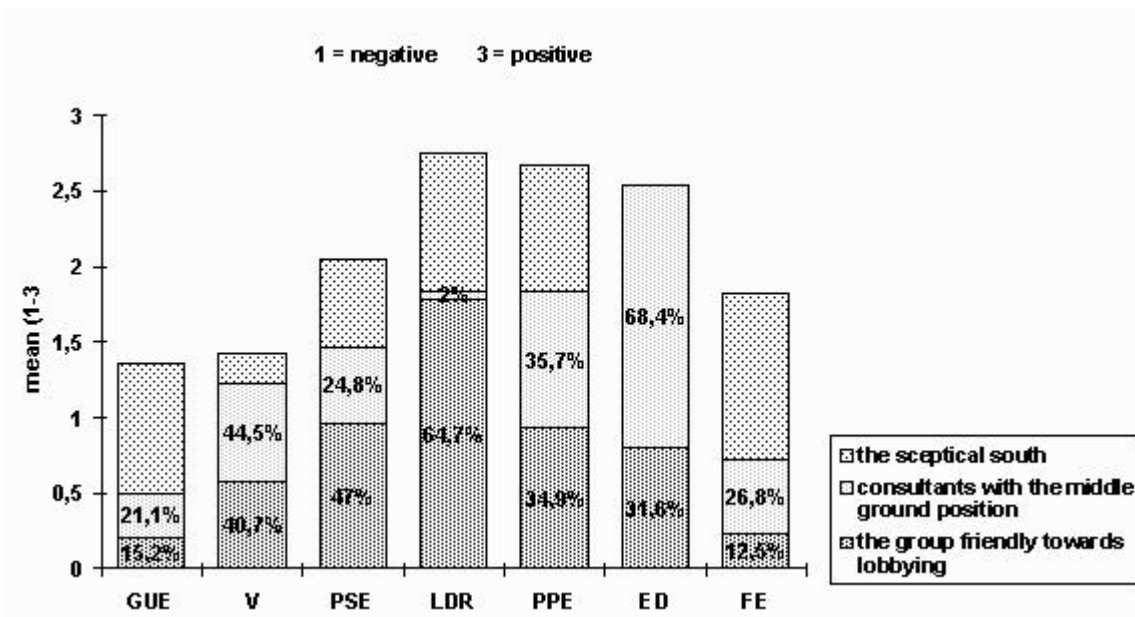
## Table 1

### Acceptance of Consultants by Nationalities

Consultants meet different acceptance among MEPs which they attribute to party allegiane and national political cultures. The fifteen member states can be comprised in three groups:			
		mean	countries
1.	the group friendly towards lobbying	2,43 to 2,58	Belgium, United Kingdom, Ireland, Finland, Austria, Denmark, The Netherlands, Sweden
2.	countries with the middle ground position towards lobbying	2,32 to 2,35	Germany, France
3.	the sceptical south	1,81 to 2,26	Luxembourg, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece

## Figure 8

### Acceptance by the Political Parties



GUE =Group of the Unitarian Left

V =The Green Group in the EP

PSE =Group of the Party of the European Socialist

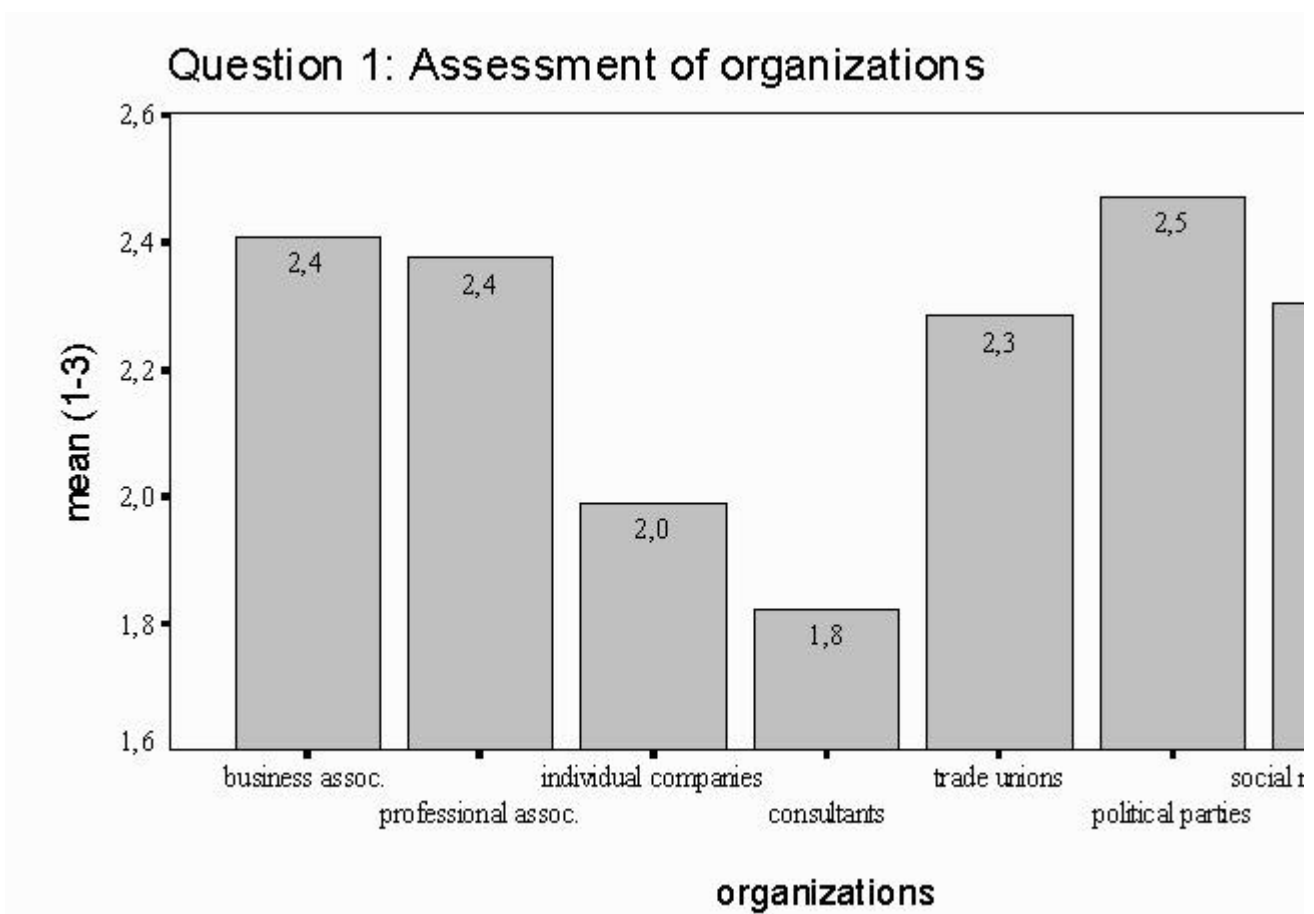
LDR =Liberal, Democratic and Reformist

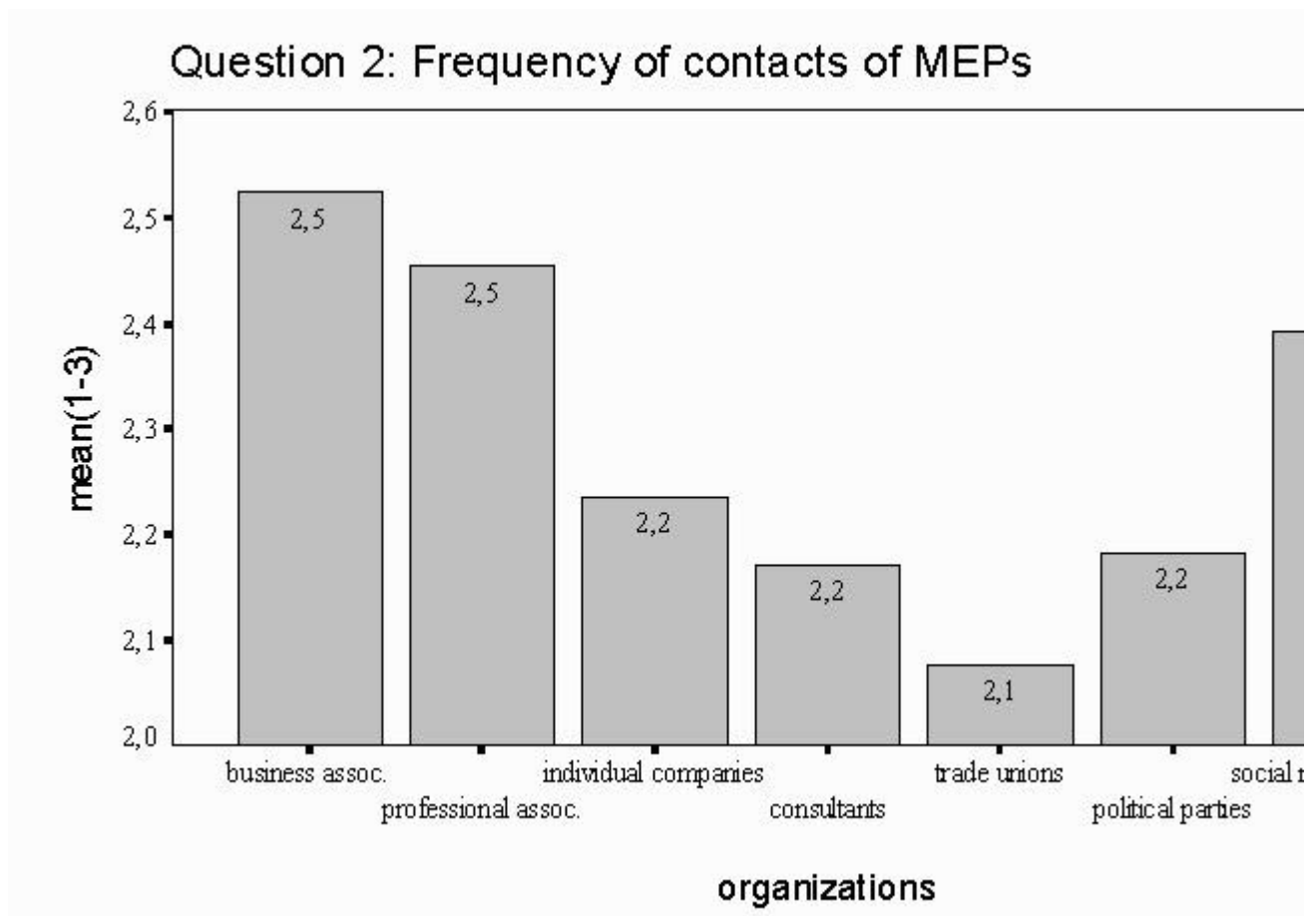
PPE =Group of the European People's Party

ED =European Democratic Group

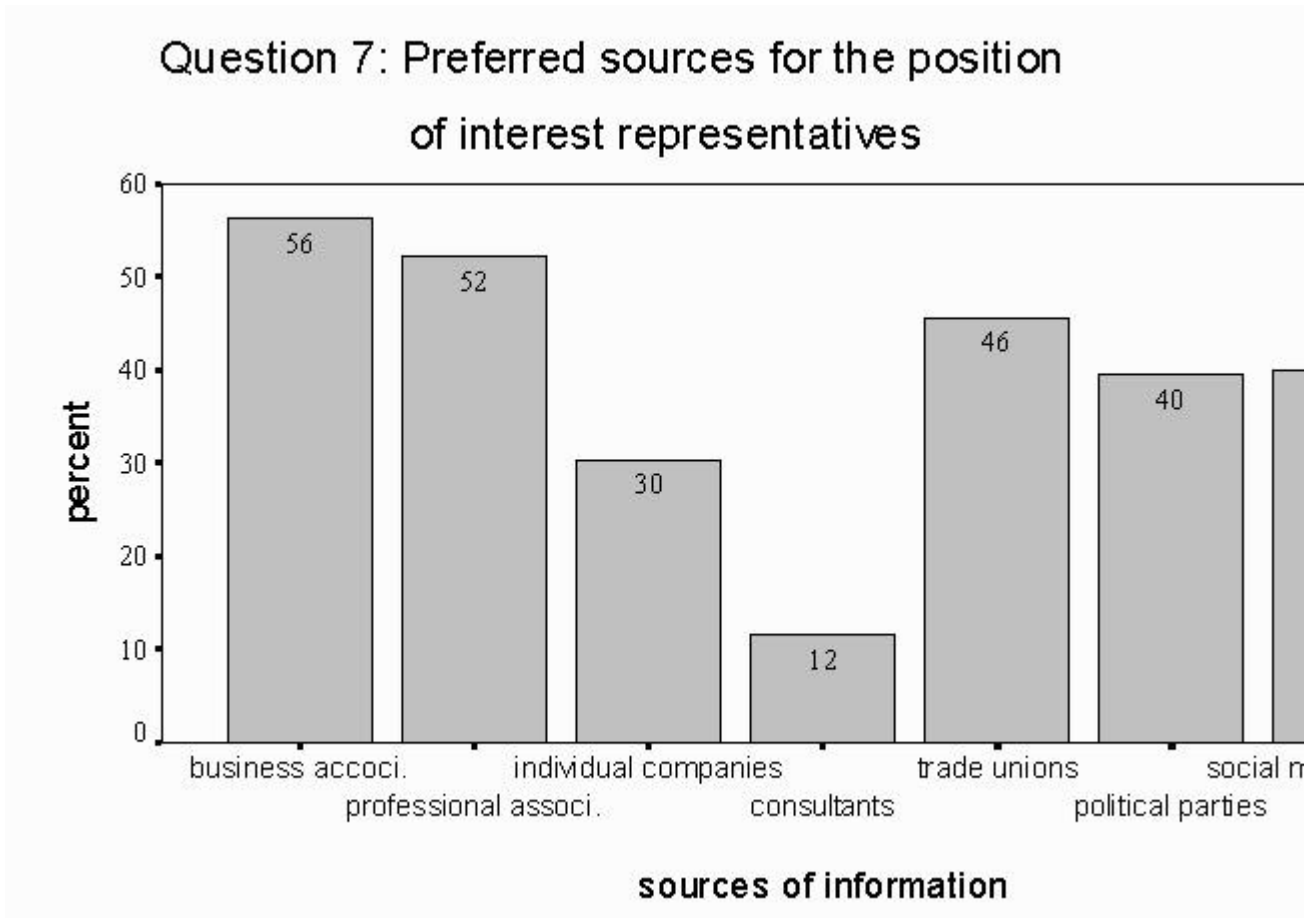
FE =Forza Europa

**Figure 9**

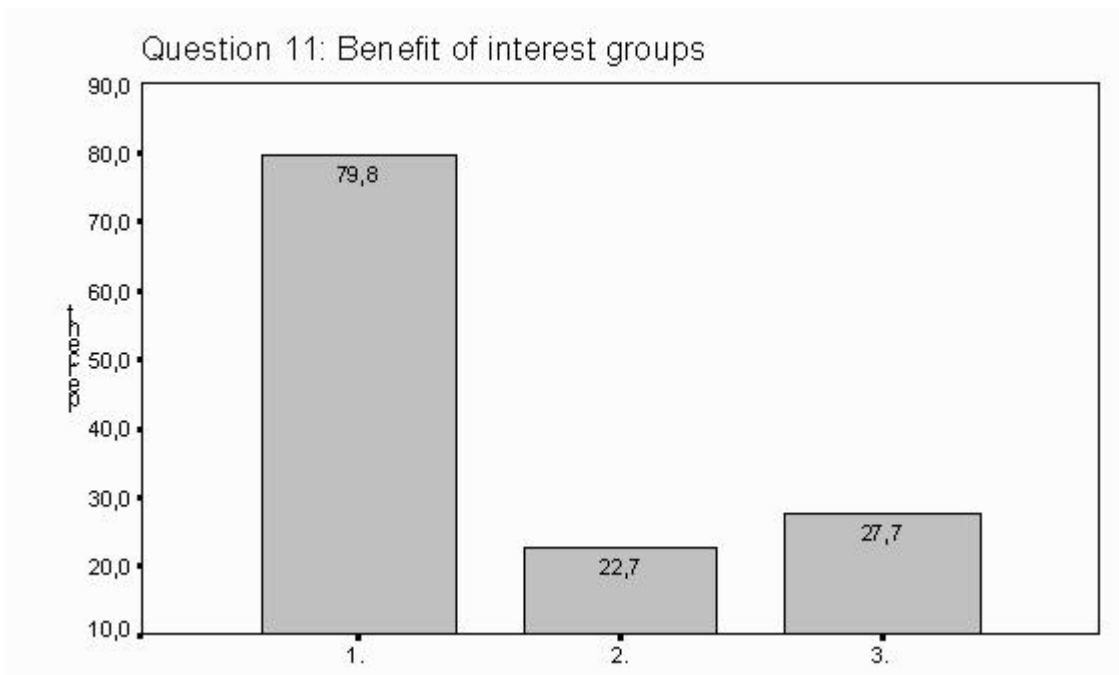


**Figure 10****Figure 11**



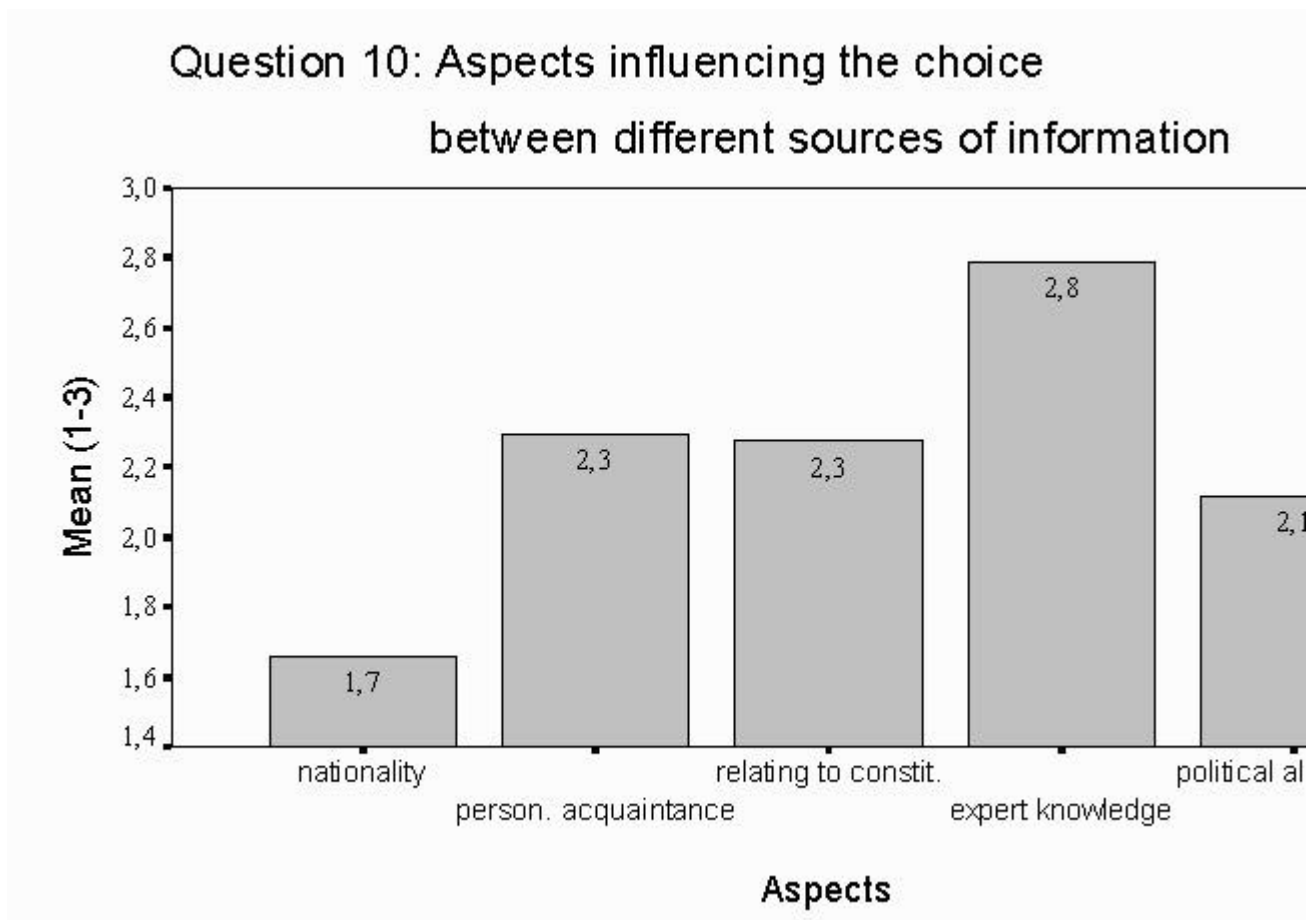


**Figure 12**

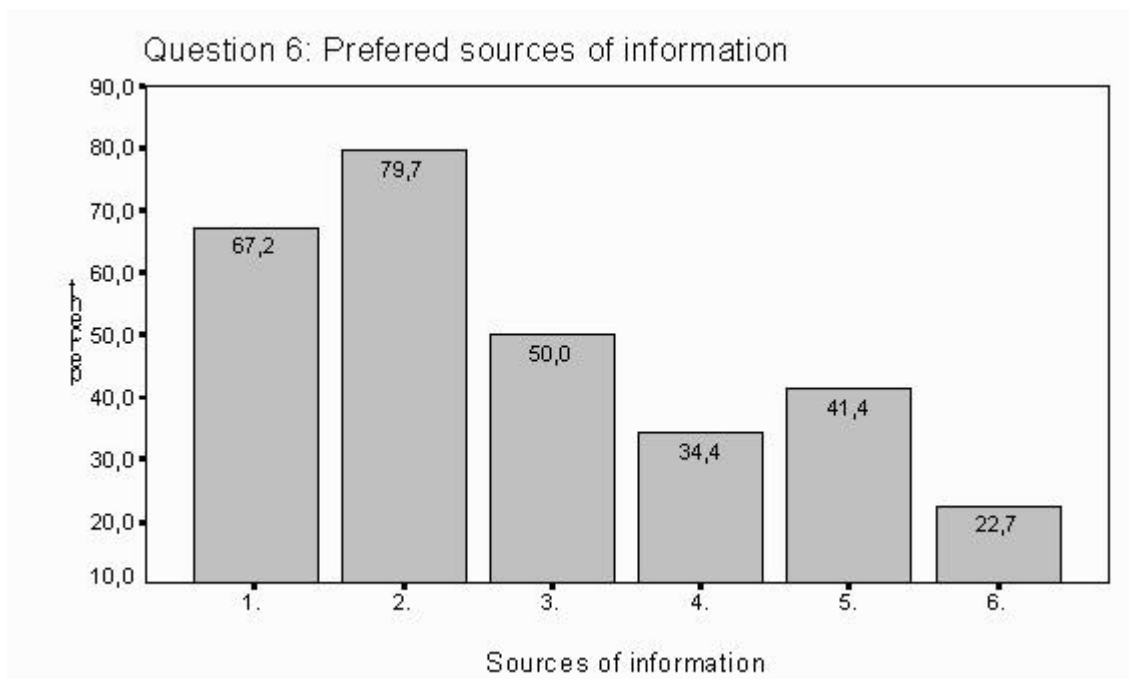


1. provide expert information
2. support grass root activities
3. aggregate divergent interests

**Figure 13**



**Figure 14**



1. the services of the EP

2. the Commission
3. national governments
4. universities or scientific institutes
5. interest organizations
6. media

## **Table 2**

### **Contacts with Associations**

	European associations		national associations		regional associations	
most contacts	79	47,9%	75	45,7%	26	16,6%
second most contacts	47	28,5%	80	48,8%	34	21,7%
third most contacts	39	23,6%	9	5,5%	97	61,8%
Missing Value	11		12		19	
Sum	176	100%	176	100%	176	100%

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