

## West European Politics Special Issue

### **Multilevel interest representation in the European Union: national interest organizations in European policy-making.**

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### **INTRODUCTION: NATIONAL INTEREST ORGANIZATIONS IN EU POLICY-MAKING**

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#### **Abstract:**

The introductory article to the special issue highlights the progression of comparative and EU interest group studies towards a field characterized by the systematic empirical testing of propositions derived from mid-range theories. Locating the special issue in this research field it argues that the study of national interest organizations in EU policy-making sheds light on a theoretically and empirically neglected research subject. It further demonstrates that the individual articles present novel developments in the study of political alignments among interest groups and political institutions, the Europeanization of domestic interest organizations, and the question of bias in interest group populations. Thereafter, it gives an overview of the individual contributions. Finally, it indicates that the special issue does not only contribute to the comparative study of interest groups, but also to the analysis of EU policy-making, multilevel governance, and political representation in the EU.

**Key words:** interest organizations, multilevel governance, European Union, policy-making, Europeanization, alignments

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## INTRODUCTION: NATIONAL INTEREST ORGANIZATIONS IN EU POLICY- MAKING

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### **Recent developments in the study of interest groups**

Almost 20 years ago, Baumgartner and Leech (1998) suggested in their review of American interest group studies that these were highly fragmented, filled only a research niche, and needed to be empirically broadened and connected with other areas in political science. 10 years later, Beyers, Eising and Maloney (2008) initiated a *West European Politics* special issue on the study of interest groups in Comparative Politics and European Union (EU) studies based on the understanding that the study of interest group systems is crucial to the understanding of the functioning of advanced democracies and multilevel governance in Europe. While confirming that interest group research formed a niche area within political science in which a variety of different research subjects co-exist, they also pointed to the growth of academic interest in group politics. Taking stock almost ten years ahead, we can observe a remarkable transformation in the study of the interest representation in both Europe and the United States.

While still forming a distinct research area with specific research concepts and mid-range theories, the field broadened to build stronger links with scholarship on public opinion (e.g. Rasmussen *et al.* 2014) and political parties (e.g. Allern and Bale 2012) as well as legislative politics (e.g. Dür *et al.* 2015) and policy studies (e.g. Baumgartner *et al.* 2009). At the same time, the empirical scope of interest group studies widened from a focus on *small-N* studies to *large-N* research to develop broader empirical and more reliable theoretical generalizations (e.g. Bunea and Baumgartner 2014; Eising 2016). Moreover, modular research projects were designed to integrate insights on major facets of interest group politics: mobilization, organization, strategies, influence, population, and bias (e.g. Beyers *et al.* 2014; Binderkrantz *et al.* 2015). Lowery *et al.* (2015: 1228) suggest that ‘the transatlantic community of scholars now broadly shares a common methodological approach to a core set of mid-range theories on interest representation’. Most studies now integrate into their research designs as explanatory factors the properties of groups and their members, institutional contexts, and issue characteristics. They reaffirmed the importance of studying interest groups in the European Union and in liberal democracies.

The recent literature scrutinized both established concepts and theories and ventured into new areas, each on the basis of large sets of observations. Following Olson’s (1965) logic of collective action, some studies looked into the mobilization of different *types of interests* and their effects on lobbying behaviour and success (e.g. Beyers and Kerremans 2007; Binderkrantz *et al.* 2015). While Olson (1965: 49-50) distinguished among intermediate and privileged groups on the one hand, and large, latent groups, on the other, today’s studies tend to separate among groups for specific interests and groups for diffuse interests. Usually, they

relate business interests to specific interests which are said to be easier to mobilize, and citizen interests to diffuse interests that are more difficult to mobilize. Recent studies confirm that such *group types* are major determinants of interest group strategy (Beyers and Kerremans 2007; Dür and Mateo 2016). Their findings often connect the interests of a group (specific versus diffuse) with its strategic choices, with business representatives as exemplary users of inside tactics (aimed at contacting decision-makers) and citizen groups as typical users of outside tactics (aimed at mobilizing the public). Further studies (e.g. Dür and De Bièvre 2007) suggest an advantage of specific interests in the generation of *resources*. They show that specific interests tend to be richer in resources than diffuse interests, because their membership consists of comparatively well-endowed firms. Companies as members tend to spend more money on the representation of interests than individual citizens as members of NGOs. Rasmussen (2015) also points to group unity as a precondition for interest group success.

All studies explicitly define and measure core concepts in interest group studies such as mobilization, access, and success. While the evidence on the relation between group type and organizational resources on access is quite consistent, there is lesser consensus on how they are related to the *success* (or preference attainment) of interest organizations and their *influence* on policy outcomes. Most studies provide evidence that a greater resource endowment of an organization furthers its access to decision-makers (Dür and Mateo 2016; Eising 2007; Klüver 2011; but see Beyers and Kerremans 2007). The common wisdom is that specific interests tend also to win over diffuse interests in public policy-making (see Lowery *et al.* 2015). That this is not always true and hinges upon several conditions has not only been shown in Vogel's (1989, 1995) analyses of business' fluctuating fortunes and the California and Delaware effects in environmental and consumer protection regulation. Recent studies also confirm that specific interests do not always win in EU legislative politics and that many policy outcomes are closer to the preferences of citizen groups than to those of business interest associations (Dür *et al.* 2015). Studies taking into account the resource endowment of interest organization indicate, with respect to the US context, that more resources are neither significantly associated with greater success nor with more influence (Baumgartner *et al.* 2009).

Both studies highlight that interest groups' success depends heavily on the responsiveness of policy-makers to their demands. A comparison of their findings points to the intervening role of *institutional contexts*. While Dür *et al.*'s (2015) study allows for the interpretation that the structural power of business is frequently insufficient to keep market and social regulation off the EU's policy-making agenda, Baumgartner *et al.* (2009) argue that the policy status quo in the United States (US) reflects the institutionalization of bias and is therefore difficult to change. Moreover, as proposal initiation is 'relatively easy', only 'few bills actually become law' in US federal legislation (Mahoney 2008: 66-67). Accordingly, when the European Commission initiates legislation, policy change is more likely to come about than in the case of federal bills in the US. This has important implications for interest group mobilization. In the EU, interest groups are more likely to mobilize in order to defend the policy status quo or to propose alternatives to the policy proposal than in the US (Eising *et al.*, in this issue),

where interest groups in favour of the status quo are more inclined to lean back (Baumgartner *et al.* 2009).

Several studies refer explicitly to factors located in national and EU level *institutional contexts* (e.g. Eising 2007; Klüver *et al.* 2015). Studies incorporating *national institutions* distinguish commonly between the classic categories of pluralism and corporatism (e.g. Schneider *et al.* 2007) or measure as a variety thereof the degree of political-economic integration (Siaroff 1999). Findings show that interest organizations have lobbying styles conforming to the interest mediation system they come from, but that they also adapt to the institutional setting they are active in (e.g. Binderkrantz 2003). Other national contexts refer to socio-economic characteristics, the duration of EU membership, ideological orientations of the governing parties, varieties of capitalism in terms of coordinated and liberal market economies (Hall and Soskice 2001) or welfare states in the form of liberal, conservative or social-democratic welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990). Although findings differ in some ways, one aspect has been shown by several scholars: lobbying strategies of interest groups vary based on their domestic experiences and institutional settings. The contributions in this special issue corroborate the continuing relevance of domestic contexts for the behaviour of domestic interest groups in EU policy-making.

Regarding the *EU institutional context*, several studies indicated that the demand for information (Bouwen 2002) and the supply of information (Chalmers 2013) vary across EU decision-making institutions like the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Council. Some studies point also to differences within these institutions such as among the Directorate Generals (DG) of the European Commission because of their varying competencies and regulatory approaches in different policy domains (e.g. Eising and Kohler-Koch 1994). A core expectation in that regard is that different policy fields attract varying levels of interest group attention (Coen and Katsaitis 2013; see also Berkhout *et al.* 2017, in this issue). In addition, several authors studied the consultation practices of the European institutions with regard to the presence and activity of interest groups (e.g. Gornitzka and Sverdrup 2008; Klüver 2011), finding that the impact of interest groups varies along the extent of EU competencies in different policy areas. Several authors refer to this as the ‘degree of regulatory exposure’. In particular, Bernhagen and Mitchell (2009) provided evidence that firms acting in industries highly affected by EU regulation are more likely to lobby both directly and collectively at the European level.

With respect to *issue characteristics*, we find the following: Taking Lowi’s classical differentiation between distributive and regulatory issues (Lowi 1972), researchers expect business interests to gain more from lobbying when distributive issues are discussed since there might be less opposition on them than on regulatory issues (Dür and Mateo 2016). Other differentiations include complex issues versus simple ones, or conflictual and salient issues (Mahoney 2008: 40-41). Issues that are salient to the public attract more stakeholders and increase the possibility of building large lobbying coalitions. Klüver (2011) finds that salience does not have a constant effect on lobbying success but that the more interest groups act on one ‘policy side’ (Baumgartner *et al.* 2009) of a salient issue, the more successful they are

(see also Kreutler 2014: 175). On highly conflictual issues, interest groups have directly contradictory positions such that striking a compromise and reaching a common position between them seems to be impossible (Mahoney 2008: 74). Mahoney (2008: 40) adds that the scope of issues also matters: niche and sector related issues allow individual interest groups greater leverage than issues with a larger scope. Her findings correspond with Culpepper's notion of 'quiet politics': The narrower an issue is and the less the public cares about it, the more managerial organizations will be able 'to exercise disproportionate influence over the rules governing that issue' (Culpepper 2011: 177). Rasmussen (2015) yields a similar finding with respect to the involvement of business groups in EP committee amendments on incoming EU legislation.

Despite the dynamic development of interest group studies, there are a number of controversial, unresolved and unaddressed issues that remain. Many studies concentrate on EU level interest representation and EU level organizations. It is less common to study the role of domestic groups in EU politics. This is surprising because these do not just present their positions on EU policies routinely to national governments. A large number of them have joined EU level groups and are also well represented in the governance structures of these organizations. And even though the EU institutions' consultation bodies are still biased towards EU level groups (Rasmussen and Gross 2015), many national interest organizations participate in the Commission's online consultations and present their interests directly to the European Commission and the European Parliament. Previous research suggests that the EU institutions depend especially on national interest groups to learn about the member states' 'domestic encompassing interest[s]' (Bouwen 2002). Empirical studies covering national interest groups as actors in EU politics confirm that differences in national and EU contexts, organizational features, and issue characteristics matter to the representation of interests in the EU's multilevel system (Knodt *et al.* 2011; Bunea and Baumgartner 2014; Klüver *et al.* 2015), thus the lack of more nuanced studies is surprising especially with regard to venue shopping and its determinants. The study of alignments, i.e. the analysis of the positional and ideological proximity between decision-makers and interest groups is missing, except for analyses looking at the European Parliament (Rasmussen 2015; Beyers *et al.* 2015) or the US context (e.g. Hojnacki and Kimball 1998). The national perspective on this topic in the EU multilevel system is yet unexplored. Finally, the participation of Southern and Eastern European interest groups in EU policy-making has received fairly little attention (see Cekik 2017, in this issue).

### **The Contribution of this Special Issue**

The contributions to this special issue (see also table 1) move the research on national interest organizations in the EU forward by addressing some of these gaps and controversies. The articles show that the challenge of multilevel interest representation affects the national interest organizations' strategies, organizational structures, relations with national parliaments, governments, and media, their collaboration with EU umbrella organizations and EU institutions and in the end their possibilities to influence policy-making. They draw a comprehensive picture of multilevel governance and the policy process in the EU. Addressing Lowery *et al.*'s (2015: 1128) concern that 'we do very little actual comparison' in interest

group studies, most articles (e.g. Berkhout *et al* 2017, Carroll and Rasmussen 2017, Cekik 2017, Eising *et al* 2017, Kohler-Koch *et al.* 2017, Marshall and Bernhagen 2017, Tatham 2017; all in this issue) broaden the predominant research design of studies on EU interest representation by connecting multilevel analyses with the comparative study of member state contexts. The contributions vary in their coverage of EU level and national level institutions, respectively.

ABOUT HERE: Table 1

As the EU policy process attracts the attention of a great number and variety of actors (see Beyers *et al.* 2008), the articles cover not only organized interest groups in a narrow sense (i.e. organized associations) but include also firms, institutions, regions, research institutes, or think tanks. They balance the study of organizations from all EU member states with in-depth analyses of organizations rooted in selected EU member states. A few contributions focus on particular categories of actors (business associations, Kohler- Koch *et al* 2017; large firms, Marshall and Bernhagen 2017; and regions, Tatham 2017, all in this issue), while most analyse different types of organizations participating in EU policy-making or present in national and EU populations of interest groups (Berkhout *et al.* 2017, Carroll and Rasmussen 2017, both in this issue). All authors conceptualize national contexts and analyse their effects on interest representation. They assess the importance of potentially important factors such as the level of economic prosperity, the duration of EU membership, the mode of national interest mediation, the associability of domestic civil society, the difference between EU member states and candidate countries, party ideologies, etc. Several look also into how issue contexts impact on the lobbying activities of domestic interest organizations (e.g. Cekik 2017, Eising *et al.* 2017, Wonka 2017, all in this issue), studying the Europeanization of policies, the type of policy, distinguishing among new and recast proposals (which explicitly aim at amending and replacing existing legislative acts in the EU) as well as among substantial policy areas such as banking and environmental policy, etc.

The contributions yield a number of new insights. In particular, they shed new light on three major research topics: (1) the alignments between interest groups and policy-makers, (2) the Europeanization and access of interest groups in new EU member states and candidate countries, and (3) the existence of bias in interest group populations.

- (1) Several contributions (see below) focus on the *alignments* between interest groups and political institutions. In this emergent research area, they present different ways of conceptualizing and measuring such alignments. Connecting with the literature on political parties, they emphasize the importance of *ideological* alignments with national members of parliament (Wonka 2017, in this issue) and national governments (Eising *et al.* 2017, in this issue) to account for the venues of domestic groups. The importance of such alignments shows in the earlier finding that a close ideological fit with EP committee members made it easier for business representatives to leave their fingerprints on the committees regulating industrial affairs and for environmental groups to do so on the environment, public affairs and health committee (Rasmussen

2015). Beyond ideological alignments, the contributions showcase the relevance of *positional* alignments and of domestic and EU level *conflicts* for venue seeking activities of large firms (Marshall and Bernhagen 2017, in this issue) and interest organizations in the EU multilevel system (Eising *et al.* 2017, in this issue). They also underline the relevance of positional alignments among EU level interest groups and their national members for the latter's strategic choices outside the EU level groups, i.e. their use of 'selective exit' (Eising 2017, in this issue). Despite using different theories, concepts and measurements, all studies reach the conclusion that ideological and positional alignments impact on the venues of domestic interest groups.

- (2) A number of contributions add to the debate on how the EU affects state and non-state stakeholders in the EU member states and also outside the EU. Contributing to the study of the EU's impact on domestic actors, structures, and processes, they confirm that such Europeanization can work in two ways, namely top-down and bottom-up (Börzel and Risse 2007). Several articles emphasize the top-down perspective and highlight the adaptation of domestic interest organizations to the EU multilevel context: Expanding beyond the EU borders, Cekik (2017, in this issue) focuses on how the EU affects national interest groups and practices of interest mediation in accession countries. She informs readers on interest group populations in Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, their membership in EU organizations and on how the EU shapes domestic structures in third countries. Surprisingly, she finds that there is no great difference regarding the Europeanisation of business and civil society interests in these three countries which she attributes to the organizations' resource dependency structures and EU sponsorship of diffuse interests. She highlights that the accession countries have interest group systems that are distinct from those in the more established Western European member states. Kohler-Koch *et al.* (2017, in this issue) scrutinize how national business associations in four countries adapt their access strategies to the EU multilevel system. By widening established models of the logic of access in EU policy-making, the authors demonstrate that the Europeanization of business interests follows fairly similar patterns across countries. Resources, representativeness, and cross-sectoral scope matter in all national business systems. Furthermore, they conclude from their cross-national comparison that Central European, i.e. Polish, business groups do not adapt less well in terms of their access to domestic and EU institutions than their Western European counterparts. Tatham (2017, in this issue) adds important findings on the regional offices in Brussels in terms of the activities they perform within the EU level environment. Like the articles in the first section, he scrutinizes the relevance of parties and party ideologies. He shows that even major party-political differences between regional and national governments do not leave much of an imprint on the activities of the regional offices in Brussels. This deviant finding – compared to those in the first section – may be due to the tighter coupling between regions and central governments than between domestic interest groups and national (government) parties, but may also result from focusing on the activity levels and general roles (as networkers, fund hunters,

intermediaries, or policy players) of the regional offices in Brussels rather than on the regions' usage of venues at different levels.

- (3) Employing frameworks rooted in the study of population ecology, two contributions tackle the question of *bias* in the EU interest group population. This classic subject in interest group research raises a fundamental question for democratic political orders: Are some interests more strongly reflected in government decisions than others? It has drawn increasing attention in the study of interest representation in the EU in recent years (e.g. Beyers *et al.* 2008; Lowery *et al.* 2015) because of a concern that imbalances might increase due to the complexity of EU multilevel politics. The existing literature demonstrates that EU level lobbying requires more resources than national lobbying which biases political participation towards more resourceful groups. But empirical studies also suggest that the EU consultation regime and the Commission's invitation practices to its expert groups effectively contain the potential bias in favour of business (Bunea 2017; Rasmussen and Gross 2015). Moreover, contrary to common perceptions, the contributors to the special issue demonstrate that the EU level interest group population resembles the populations of interest groups in the member states (Berkhout *et al.* 2017, in this issue), when controlling, *inter alia*, for policy domains. The authors point out that a strong presence of business associations is a characteristic feature of the populations at both levels. They also suggest that business interest associations may have a larger representative capacity than other group types. In that respect, Kohler-Koch *et al.* (2017, in this issue) find that domestic business interest associations (BIA) representing a larger share of their potential membership are more likely to have both access (rather than not) to the European Parliament and more frequent contacts with the Commission than BIAs that are less representative. Another contribution studies the population density of national interest groups in the EU focusing on their presence in the European Parliament (Carroll and Rasmussen 2017, in this issue). The authors find that countries with a higher number of national interest groups per MEP are among the oldest members of the EU, underlining that a tradition of national interest group mobilization may be a source of bias. This interpretation is held up by their finding that the presence of national groups in the EP is significantly affected by the associational culture prevalent within the country of origin.

The articles in this special issue are indicative of the move from case studies towards theory-based large-*N* studies in EU and comparative interest group research. Several contributions (Eising *et al.* 2017, Eising 2017; Carroll and Rasmussen 2017, all in this issue) build on the INTEREURO project,<sup>1</sup> in which issue-based (top-down) sampling served to study, from different perspectives, legislative lobbying on EU directive and regulation proposals for the population of organizations that were active on these proposals. Another large-scale project they draw on is the EUROLOB II project (Kohler-Koch *et al.* 2017, in this issue),<sup>2</sup> which analyses the strategies of British, German, French and Polish interest groups in EU policy-making on the basis of the bottom-up sampling of national interest group directories. Marshall and Bernhagen (2017, in this issue) use data collected within the *Borderless Politics* project,<sup>3</sup>

which analyses the political and social strategies of large business firms around the world. Other contributions are based on comprehensive surveys, web-site analyses, and content analyses scrutinizing the EU impact on domestic interest organizations. Each article employs state-of-the-art research techniques and adapts them to the needs of interest group research. In line with the broadening of the field in recent years, the authors' findings are not only relevant to EU interest group studies but address also the literatures on multilevel governance, policy-making, Europeanization, and political representation in the EU, deepening our understanding of the functioning of advanced democracies and multilevel governance in Europe.

### **An overview of the individual contributions**

The special issue is divided in three parts. The *first* section presents research on alignments of national interest organizations. The first contribution analyses how the alignments and arguments of domestic interest groups impact on their participation in national and EU level consultations on EU policies. The study covers interest organizations in the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, Slovenia, and the UK (Eising *et al.* 2017, in this issue). The authors test new hypotheses on the linkage between arguments and positional as well as ideological alignments and the national groups' strategic representation. Drawing on original data from research on 20 EU directive proposals that were tabled between 2008 and 2010 by the European Commission, they use a large-*N* study in which they include elaborate operationalisations of country and policy contexts, as well as group types. The authors provide evidence that alignments, positional and ideological, and arguments leave an imprint on the participation of domestic interests in consultations on EU policies. They identify four varieties of interest representation routines in response to different alignment patterns and conclude that the role of alignments and arguments cannot be neglected anymore in the analysis of political access and venue shopping in EU policy-making.

The second contribution in that section explores the lobbying strategies of large firms in EU policy-making (Marshall and Bernhagen 2017, in this issue). In detail, the authors focus on large companies from Germany and Great Britain and investigate how their in-house lobbyists' perceptions of government-business relations and national systems of interest representation shape the firms' strategies in the multilevel system. They show that perceived conflict between firms and public authorities at the national level as well as greater conflict at the national level than at EU level increase corporate lobbying at the EU level. The authors also find that national types of interest intermediation shape relative corporate engagement at the EU level as well as the readiness of firms to shift venue. Thereby, Marshall and Bernhagen contribute to studies which provide evidence that national institutional contexts continues to shape business political behaviour in the multilevel EU system, but in more complex ways than have been previously considered. Combined with the findings of Eising *et al.* (2017, in this issue) and Wonka (2017, in this issue), we see that alignments between decision-makers and interest groups must not be neglected when studying the interest groups' venue choices and relations with EU level groups.

Shifting the perspective to the policy-makers, Wonka (2017, in this issue) studies in detail the relations between members of the German parliament (Bundestag) and interest groups on

issues related to EU policy-making. He situates their interactions in the context of the MPs' intra-party information exchanges and provides evidence putting into question exchange-access theories. Moving away from the idea that information is a scarce resource for parliamentarians, Wonka provides evidence that information gathering strategies of MPs in EU policy-making are systematically shaped by partisan ideologies and electoral incentives. Rather than screening diverse information delivered by a plethora of interest organizations, legislators strengthen the ties with those groups that are part of their core constituency and broadly share their political views. Here in particular, Wonka finds that the model of information provision as a subsidy developed by Hall and Deardorff (2006) for the US context holds also for European policy-making in the German Bundestag. Wonka's contribution fills several research gaps, starting with an important new data set from the perspective of politicians to his findings on information provision and ideological alignments.

Finally, building on Hirschman's distinction of loyalty, exit and voice strategies, Eising (2017, in this issue) studies the performance of EU level interest groups with respect to their two core functions: the provision of policy information to their members and the formation of a common position to represent them in EU policy-making. Suggesting that full exit from EU level groups is highly uncommon, he develops the category of selective exit to characterise the strategies of national interest organizations in response to a poor performance of EU associations. According to his findings, national members resort to voice within the EU level groups and engage in coalitions and media debates outside them to counteract performance failures. In contrast to conventional wisdom, misalignments of national members' preferences with EU level groups' common positions do not leave an imprint on the members' usage of inside strategies at national and EU levels.

The *second* section highlights the relevance of Europeanization and the corresponding access of national interest organizations to political institutions in the EU multilevel system. Kohler *et al.* (2017, in this issue) focus on the access of business interest associations (BIA) to state institutions in Germany, Poland, France, the UK, and at EU level. The article compares the contact patterns of BIAs to national institutions with those to EU institutions, differentiating between executive and legislative institutions and between top level politicians and bureaucrats at the working level. The authors further examine which factors explain similarities and differences in the selection of targets and the frequency of contacts. Broadening Bouwen's (2002) exchange-access model of interest intermediation in the EU, they provide evidence that more financial resources, greater mobilization of potential members, and a wider sectoral scope tend to promote access. Contrary to earlier studies, the authors demonstrate that the economic importance of national sectors is not relevant to the access of BIAs to policy-makers.

Cekik (2017, in this issue) asks how interest organizations outside the EU (Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro) have responded to the challenge of EU accession and their level of Europeanization. Using survey data, she studies the interest groups' involvement in the EU accession process: groups' activities at the national level related to EU accession, their membership in EU level associations, and contacts with EU institutions. As explanatory

factors, she considers the groups' access to national institutions in domestic politics, their resources, the Europeanization of policy areas and the groups' dependence on EU funding. Cekik finds that these factors account for interest groups' levels of Europeanization, while variations across group types are insignificant. Her article fills an important research gap by analysing the role of interest organizations from EU accession countries, which have been overlooked for many years. In addition, she finds that national context characteristics as well as organisational structures like membership and access strategies account better for the Europeanization of groups than their type of interest which contradicts the findings on group type effects in established EU member states.

In the third contribution to this section, Tatham (2017, in this issue) explores the effects of organisational factors and domestic contexts on regional interest representation in the EU. The particular significance of his article for this special issue is an expansion of traditional understandings of interest representation to regional representations at the European level. These are rarely included in interest representation studies. Based on novel survey data for more than 100 regional offices, Tatham explores their roles and activities at the EU level. He seeks to account for their activities by linking them to office-level, regional and domestic contextual factors in a series of multilevel models. His results point out that younger regional representations are more geared at obtaining funding information and building ties with other regions than at engaging in legislative lobbying when compared to older, more established regional representations. His results show that a greater extent of self-rule in the region of origin is associated with a greater engagement in legislative lobbying at EU level. While many activities of the regional offices in Brussels are certainly geared at interest representation in the EU, the author cautions that supranational mobilisation by domestic actors is not always aimed at obtaining policy influence.

The *third* and final section addresses the important question of representational bias existing within the population of interest organizations. Berkhout *et al.* (2017: in this issue) analyse how the EU's population of interest organizations compares with those in EU member states. They explore a potential bias towards business representatives in the EU interest group population as well as the representational capacity of the organizations in the EU and national populations. The authors compare for the first time the EU level interest group population with those in France, Great Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands, thus performing a comparison across distinct governance levels, European vs national. They also account for different aspects of the diversity within the distinct interest group populations. The results show that the EU interest group population does not differ significantly from the national interest group populations, when controlling for other explanations such as policy domains, bringing new insights to studies on the EU interest group population ecology. This finding challenges accounts that see the EU as a special case, or characterize the EU interest group population as being uniquely biased towards business organizations.

Carroll and Rasmussen (2017, in this issue) present a comprehensive study of the population of national interest groups lobbying the European Parliament (EP). In the first part of their analysis, the authors place the absolute number of organized interests in relation to

different benchmarks such as the size of the national economy, population size, and the number of country seats in the EP. In the second part, they investigate how differences in domestic contexts condition the representation of national interest groups in the EP. Here, they take into account hitherto neglected national cultural resources (understood as the national associational culture). Their results show that countries with large levels of citizen activism have a larger number of groups present in the European Parliament, adding to studies that concentrate on national economic resources as a source of mobilisation. More generally, these findings enhance our understanding of how specific aspects of domestic contexts relate to the access of domestic interest organizations to EU institutions.

In sum, this special issue is a further step in the progression of comparative and EU interest group studies towards a field characterized by the systematic empirical testing of propositions derived from mid-range theories. With its focus on national interest groups in the EU multilevel system, it highlights a theoretically and empirically neglected research subject. Finally, it presents novel developments in the study of political alignments among interest groups and political institutions, the Europeanization of domestic interest organizations, and the question of bias in interest group populations.

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Table 1 Major characteristics of the contributions

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Samp- ling</b>	<b>Levels</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>Type of interest organi- sation</b>	<b>Main RI: Alignments and venues</b>	<b>Main RI: Access and Europeaniza- tion</b>	<b>Main RI: Bias in interest represent- tation</b>	<b>Dependent variable(s)</b>
<b>Eising, Rasch, Roz- bicka, Fink- Hafner, Hafner- Fink, Novak</b>	Top down	EU and national	Germany, Nether- lands, Slovenia, Sweden, United Kingdom	Various	Positional and ideological alignments			Participation in national and EU level policy consultations
<b>Marshall and Bernhagen</b>	Bottom Up	EU and national	Germany, United Kingdom	Large firms	Conflict levels in the relation with domestic and EU policy- makers			Proportion of EU lobbying time relative to overall lobbying time
<b>Wonka</b>	Bottom Up (Sample of MPs)	National	Germany	Various	Ideological alignments			Information ex- change between MPs and interest groups
<b>Eising</b>	Top Down	EU	Germany, Nether- lands, Slovenia, Sweden, United Kingdom	Various	Positional align- ments and per- formance gaps of EU level groups			National mem- bers' strategies outside EU level groups
<b>Kohler- Koch, Kotzian,</b>	Bottom up	EU and national	Germany, France, Poland, United Kingdom	Business interest associ-		Access of business interest associations		Access to nation- al and EU level institutions

<b>and Quittkat</b>				ations				
<b>Cekik</b>	Bottom up	EU and national	Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia	Various		Europeanization of interest organisations in accession countries		Importance of and access to national and EU institutions; Membership in EU level groups
<b>Tatham</b>	Top Down	EU and national	Regional actors from 20 countries	Regions		Representation of regional interests		Activities (e.g. lobbying, liaison, funding) of regional offices in Brussels
<b>Berkhout, Hanegraaff and Braun</b>	Bottom up	EU and national	Germany, France, Netherlands, United Kingdom, European Union	Various			Bias in interest group populations	Composition and representational characteristics of EU and member states' interest group populations
<b>Carroll and Rasmussen</b>	Top down	EU	All EU member states	Various			Bias in the population of national interest groups present in the EP	Absolute and relative population density

Note: RI = research interest

<sup>1</sup> [www.intereuro.eu](http://www.intereuro.eu)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/d7/en/projects/eurolob-ii-europeanization-of-interest-intermediation>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/research/borderlesspolitics/>