

Public Interest Coalitions in the EU

Ruth Webster

The Robert Gordon University
Faculty of Management
School of Public Administration & Law
Garthdee Road
ABERDEEN
AB10 7QE
United Kingdom

Tel: + 44 (0) 1224 263400
Fax: + 44 (0) 1224 263434
E-Mail: r.webster@rgu.ac.uk

Paper for presentation at Panel Session '2B. A Lost Case? Public Interest Groups in the European Union' at the European Community Studies Association (ECSA) Seventh Biennial International Conference
May 31 - June 2, 2001, Madison, Wisconsin

Public Interest Coalitions in the EU

Introduction

Interests at the European Union (EU) level inhabit a relatively small world. In common with the protagonists in other interest group systems, those operating within the EU system are aware of their contemporaries. More than this, interests interact. The formation of, and participation in, interest group coalitions is one possible outcome of interest group interaction and occurs when interests engage in the collective pursuit of shared political goals. The purpose of such collaboration distinguishes this type of interaction from others, including the exchange of information and ad hoc meetings between interests in response to policy or legislative developments. Collaboration is much more than talking - participants choose to implement a joint strategy to pursue common interests in the shape of public policy goals. This paper investigates coalition formation at the EU level. More specifically it analyses the nature and characteristics of interest group coalitions and examines the extent to which issues, the EU institutions and opposition groups encourage interests to create and join coalitions.

The first part of the paper outlines the framework for the investigation. Drawing from the literature on interest group coalitions, the framework presents a range of criteria to distinguish patterns of interest collaboration. Ideas from the literature on American and European interest representation and new institutionalism complete the framework by creating a list of factors with the potential to drive the formation and membership of interest group coalitions. The second part of the paper comprises a case study of a public interest coalition involving European level environmental, consumer, citizen and public health groups. The case study evidence generates several insights as to the nature of interest group coalitions at the EU level and the factors which encourage groups to act collectively to further common public policy goals.

In comparison with the private (that is, economic) interests seeking to influence EU public policies, European groups representing *inter alia* the environment, consumers and social interests (for example, women's rights, public health, disadvantaged groups) are in a less advantageous position. For example, their resources and ability to sustain actions throughout the policy process cannot match the capacity of business and industry interests. Contrasting the positions of business and environmental groups Grant, Matthews and Newell suggest that "business enjoys advantages along four key (interrelating) dimensions: (i) structural power; (ii) financial and staff resources; (iii) contact resources; (iv) legitimacy" (2000, pp.64-65). Structural power and legitimacy refer to the economic links between business interests, economic growth per se and the economic ambitions of the EU in particular. Contact resources refer to the numerous contacts business interests have with the EU institutions. These key dimensions apply more generally to public interests at the EU level. However, the situation for public interest groups is by no means desperate. By maintaining a foothold in the policy areas that concern them most, public groups can and do influence the policy process. Moreover, they adopt various strategies of influence, including collaborative action where groups act in concert to achieve shared public policy goals. It might be argued that public interests employ several strategies of influence in an attempt to compete with business interests on more equal terms. In other words, seeking to effect policy

change from a less advantageous position makes for innovative action. Comparisons between public and private interest groups link to one of the external factors investigated in the case study, namely the potential influence of opposition interests on collaborative action.

1. A framework for investigating interest coalitions

Different types of coalition emerge at the EU level. Indeed, patterns appear as groups create and join new coalitions. Their only common feature, which distinguishes coalitions from other forms of interest group interaction, is their purpose or *raison d'être*, namely the furtherance of their members' shared public policy goals. This emphasis on the purpose of an interest group coalition follows Hula's definition of a political coalition in which the member organisations are "united by a common political goal" (1995, p.240). The public interests in the case study coalition act in concert to secure common public policy goals.

The paper considers interest groups as rational actors in the sense that they pursue the strategies they consider most likely to bring success in the shape of desired policy outputs. Consequently, collective action in the shape of a coalition is one of several strategies to secure public policy goals. By treating interest groups as rational actors, the paper provides an answer, albeit a partial one, to the question of what encourages groups to form and join coalitions. Put simply, interest groups choose the coalition strategy to further their common public policy goals. The collective action literature suggests, and studies (see for instance, Hula, 1999, 1995; Berry, 1989) confirm, the importance of collective incentives for acting collaboratively, that is the desire to influence policy decisions and policy outputs. For example, Hula (1999, 1995) identifies strategic, policy-oriented incentives as encouraging to groups seeking to influence public policies. They perceive coalition strategies as "the most effective way to shape policy outcomes" (Hula, 1995, p.241).

In addition, the literature and empirical evidence highlight the role of selective, member only incentives for creating and joining coalitions. Examples of selective incentives include access to information that is exchanged exclusively between coalition partners (Hula, 1999, 1995), the potential to save scarce resources (time, money and human resources) by sharing the burden of campaigning (Baggott, 1995; Berry, 1989), and the opportunity to participate in a campaign without making too great a commitment. Hula (1999, 1995) refers to the last example as a symbolic incentive. He argues that the involvement of some groups in coalitions is largely symbolic – little more than a means to satisfying their members (individuals or organisations) that they are diligently representing their interests to policy makers, or as a way of assisting fellow groups by lending their mainly passive support to collaborative ventures (Hula, 1995, pp.248-249). As such, interest groups joining for symbolic reasons may have less interest in the collective incentives on offer.

The role of collective and selective incentives in the formation of and participation in public interest coalitions at the EU level is discussed briefly with reference to the case study. It is considered in greater detail elsewhere (Webster, 2000, 1998). This paper looks beyond incentives and the collective action literature to focus on other factors with the potential to influence interest group collaboration, namely the role of public policy issues, opposition groups and the EU institutions. The second part of the framework for investigating interest group coalitions outlines the literature from

which these factors are drawn. The first part of the framework examines the criteria for recognising different types of interest group coalition.

1.1 Coalition criteria

Studies of interest group coalitions seeking to influence the Washington policy process refer to several criteria for distinguishing between types of coalition: the duration of a coalition, its breadth of concern, membership profile and degree of formality. Loomis (1986) identifies two coalition properties, the number of issues that a coalition addresses and the life span of a coalition (that is, the duration of the collaboration). He describes four types of interest group coalition based on these characteristics: temporary coalitions and enduring coalitions that address either single or multiple issues. Schlozman and Tierney (1986) add the membership profile and degree of formality criteria. The members of a coalition are a distinguishing feature. The case study coalition has a heterogeneous membership profile with members representing a range of interests from the environment to public health. It is common for the members of a coalition to represent interests from the same sector. The Group of Eight (G-8) coalition of the eight European level environmental interest groups with a permanent presence in Brussels is an example of a public interest coalition with a homogeneous membership. The degree of formality criterion refers to the structural dynamics of coalitions. Coalitions differ according to the way in which they are organised and how they operate. Schlozman and Tierney (1986) distinguish between coalitions with formal and informal structures. A membership subscription scheme, meetings schedule and records of meetings are indicative of a formally structured coalition (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986, p.48). The presence of a secretariat (staff) to organise and maintain the interest group coalition is a further indicator of a formally organised coalition. In more informally organised coalitions the members "contribute time, professional help, clerical services, and the like, according to their resources and their stake in the matter at issue" (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986, p.48). The distinction between coalitions with a formal or informal structure is somewhat subjective. Estimating the degree of formality relies upon arbitrary judgement. Indeed, is the presence of a permanent secretariat a more valid indicator of a formally structured coalition than a schedule of meetings? What difference does a schedule make if there are only a handful of meetings per year? While this issue persists, different types of coalition are readily identifiable even if their precise structural characteristics are not. The organisational and operational criterion is particularly important in relation to the nature of interest group coalitions at the EU level. The empirical findings from the case study will enable us to return to this discussion of formal and informal coalitions.

Evidence of interest group coalitions in Washington reveals the popularity of temporary coalitions created to pursue single policy or legislative issues (Berry, 1989, p.166). This type of coalition is attractive because it is flexible (Berry, 1989, p.166). It does not commit members' resources for an indefinite period or spread them over a series of issues. Resources are a key concern for interest groups. The limited duration of a temporary coalition enables groups to deploy and re-deploy their resources as new priorities emerge. Long-term coalitions involve more enduring resource commitments (Berry, 1989, p.167).

Turning to the membership profile of coalitions, Berry (1989, p.168) notes that most begin with groups who consider themselves allies. Allies tend to be groups from the same policy area or sector. In other words, coalitions invariably fall within

Schlozman and Tierney's (1986, p.48) homogeneous membership category. Collaborating groups tend to develop enduring links as repeated patterns of collaboration foster communication and trust advantages for coalition allies (Berry, 1989, p.168).

Although interest groups operating in the same policy area appear to have an advantage over interest groups from different policy areas, this does not jeopardise the formation of coalitions with members from different policy sectors. Heterogeneous coalitions emerge when public policy issues affect groups from more than one policy sector (Berry, 1989, p.169). Interest groups coalesce around issues therefore, issues help identify potential coalition partners. Consequently, unlikely partnerships can develop between groups that consider themselves ubiquitous foes rather than friends. The shared goals created by policy and legislative issues maintain coalitions of members who normally have competing interests. Moreover, if other issues affect unlikely coalition partners in the future, collaborative experience may encourage interest groups to act in concert again and embark upon new coalition ventures (Berry, 1989, p. 169). Coalitions provide groups with an opportunity to pursue issues that they would not address by themselves (Berry, 1989, p.166).

Regarding the structural characteristics criterion, informal coalitions are more common than formal coalitions in Washington (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986, p.48). At the EU level, many private interest coalitions and public interest coalitions are organised on an informal basis. Pijenburg's (1998) study of "ad hoc coalitions" created to influence the issue of the legal protection of computer software investigated rival coalitions of private interests (companies) confirms this characteristic. It is important to note that informal organisation is not exclusive to temporary coalitions. The G-8 forum is enduring pertinent, EU example of an enduring, multi-issue interest group coalition organised on an informal basis. There is no secretariat, membership subscription or formal record of meetings and communications within the G-8.

1.2 Factors encouraging the formation of, and membership of, coalitions ~ issues, opposition interests, EU institutions and the institutional landscape

Many factors have the potential to encourage interest groups to create and join coalitions, not least the range of collective and selective incentives available to groups that engage in collaborative action (see above). Others separate into two broad categories representing internal or group-based factors and external or extra-group factors. Internal factors include interest groups' collaborative history and experience, resources, and internal decision-making mechanisms (that is, who within the organisation chooses the strategies for influencing the EU policy-process). The paper concentrates on the potential influence of external factors upon the formation of and participation in coalitions, namely public policy or legislative issues, interest groups with opposing policy positions, the EU institutions and the institutional landscape or policy-making environment at the EU level. The following section examines each external factor in turn.

Berry (1989), Schlozman and Tierney (1986) and Loomis (1986) identify the role of issues in coalition formation. Coalitions emerge around policy and legislative issues as do potential coalition members. Berry suggests that groups tend to work

individually on issues of great importance to their interests and collaborate on issues they would not normally address by themselves (1989, p.166). Thus, coalitions provide groups with an opportunity to pursue issues they would otherwise respond to (Berry, 1989, p.166). Loomis discusses three ways in which issues affect collaboration: "differences among coalitions spring from the nature of the policies they support ... cooperation is often necessitated because of issue complexity ... coalitions play especially active roles in broadening, or sometimes in restricting, the "scope of the conflict" on a given issue" (1986, p.267). Loomis (1986) acknowledges, and draws upon, Schlozman and Tierney's (1986) research for the first point. In essence, different types of policy beget different types of coalition. This first point illustrates the way in which issues can affect the nature and characteristics of coalitions. The second point emphasises the ways in which issues can encourage groups to create and join coalitions. Some issues demand collaborative action because they are so complicated that groups are unable to address them single-handedly. Complex issues often lead to coalitions of unlikely allies (see Berry, 1989 above). Finally, interest group coalitions can affect the level of public attention policy and legislative issues receive (Loomis, 1986, p.267). Coalitions can "broaden the scope of the conflict" (Loomis, 1986, p.268) by disseminating clear, concise information to improve knowledge and understanding, and attract public and government attention. The ability of coalitions to influence issues in this way might similarly encourage collaboration.

The second external factor with the potential to influence the creation of and participation in coalitions is the presence of opposition groups. The introduction distinguishes between public and private interests operating at the EU level, particularly in terms of resources and institutional access. Public interests often find themselves in opposition to private interest over public policy issues. For example, adversarial relations between business and industry groups and environmental groups are commonplace. There is a general recognition among the environmental groups of the need to work together and gain support from actors who share common interests in an issue given the strength of industry opposition (Biliouri, 1999). The European environmental groups have different attitudes towards industry, some more co-operative than others (Biliouri, 1999, pp.178-179). Indeed, it is important not to consider public and private groups to always advance conflicting policy and legislative positions. However, there is some evidence of an enduring opposition to environmental protection issues at the EU level. Rucht notes that the European environmental lobby faces strong opposition from the "extremely well-equipped and influential lobbies in the chemical, automobile, electronics, transport, and agribusiness sectors, which all have their European umbrella organisations in Brussels" (1993, p.89).

Hojnacki (1997) investigates how perceptions of an organised opposition can influence the decision to join a coalition. She argues that groups partly base their membership decisions on the presence and strength of opposition interests: "When opponents are strong, organizations will see greater benefits in joining a coalition with other groups" (Hojnacki, 1997, pp.84-85). Groups will be more amenable to collaboration if they perceive a strong organised opposition because "Alliances provide a means of showing broader support for a cause or interest" (Hojnacki, 1997, p.67).

The new institutionalism literature suggests ways in which the EU institutions and the institutional landscape can encourage coalition behaviour among interest groups. This literature investigates how institutions "structure political interactions and in this way affect political outcomes" (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992, p.13). Several strands or

schools of new institutionalism are evident within the literature (historical, rational choice and sociological); each adopts a different position on the degree of influence institutions wield. Institutions have considerable capacity for shaping political interactions according to the historical school. Historical institutionalists consider institutions capable of affecting actors' preferences (goals) as well as the strategies they select to realise them. Rational choice institutionalists limit the scope of institutions to shaping actors' strategies, leaving their preferences aside. By adopting the position of the historical school consideration must be given to preference formation and the role of institutions in shaping actors' goals. By following the rational choice school explanations of institutional influence are restricted to actors' strategies be they individual or collaborative.

Although the debate about the extent to which institutions shape political interactions is very important, it is not crucial to this investigation of public interest group coalitions. The paper regards interest groups as rational actors who pursue public policy goals by adopting the most effective strategies of influence. Creating and joining coalitions is one of those strategies. Whether to collaborate is a strategy decision, not a matter of preference formation. Indeed, the paper defines groups' preferences as public policy goals. Coalitions are a means of securing these goals. The new institutionalism literature emphasises how important it is to consider the EU institutions and institutional landscape and the manner in which interest groups relate to them, including the way in which they pursue their public policy goals. In essence, "institutions matter" (Bulmer, 1993, p.355). Moreover, they may encourage groups to collaborate.

There is considerable scope for analysing institutional influence by adopting an inclusive (historical institutionalist) definition of institutions. Bulmer defines institutions "as meaning formal institutions; informal institutions and conventions; the norms and symbols embedded in them; and policy instruments and procedures" (1998, p.370). Bulmer (1998) identifies several ways in which the EU institutions can structure political outcomes. Adopting a historical institutionalist perspective he notes that the formal supranational institutions are not neutral actors mediating the preferences and demands of others (including member states and interest groups). The formal supranational institutions have their own agendas and shape the policy process accordingly. For example, the institutions act as gatekeepers allowing only some groups the opportunity to influence the policy process (Bulmer, 1998, p.374). Secondly, these formal supranational institutions can act as "key players in their own right" (Bulmer, 1998, p.374). The European Commission's agenda-setting role exemplifies the way in which the supranational institutions can shape the policy process and the behaviour of the other institutional and interest group actors.

Walker's (1991) examination of the role of institutional patronage in the formation and maintenance of interest groups within the American political system identifies a very direct potential influence upon collaborative behaviour. The financial assistance provided by the European Commission to public interest groups in particular is acknowledged widely. However, it is not known whether institutional patrons support the collaborative fora in which interest groups participate or how such assistance might influence the behaviour of these participants and the patterns of collaboration that emerge.

The two-part framework presents criteria for distinguishing between types of interest group coalition and three external factors with the potential to influence collaborative behaviour. A case study of a public interest group coalition and a much discussed issue provides the empirical test for the ideas developed in this section.

2. Case Study ~ Auto Oil I and the *European Campaign for Clean Air*

The EU's preparations for setting motor vehicle emission standards for 2000 (and related measures to combat this source of air pollution) is the case study setting for this analysis of public interest group collaboration and the external factors with the potential to encourage coalition formation and membership. Essentially, the preparations comprise the Commission's Auto Oil I Programme and the initial package of legislative proposals which stems from it. The case study concentrates on the formulation stage of the policy process during which the future policy approach for combating vehicle emissions was established and the legislative proposals were developed and refined before their adoption by the Commission. This stage offers interests considerable opportunities to influence policy-makers. Furthermore, the substantive period for collecting data for this case study occurred during the policy formulation stage.¹ The paper acknowledges subsequent work by Warleigh (2000) and incorporates findings which confirm and extend existing knowledge of the nature of collaborative behaviour by interests at the EU level. A coalition of public interest groups emerged during the EU's policy and legislative preparations. The *European Campaign for Clean Air (ECCA)* had an original core membership of six European level groups: the European Bureau of Consumer Unions (BEUC), the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Community (COFACE), the Euro Citizen Action Service (ECAS), the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) and the European Federation for Transport and the Environment (T&E). Discussion of the goals and actions of the *ECCA* follows a summary of the case study issue.

2.1 The Auto Oil I Programme and legislative proposals

The adoption of two directives to reduce air pollution from motor vehicles (one on emissions and one on fuel quality) (European Communities, 1998) by the European Parliament and the Council on October, 13 1998 concluded a lengthy co-decision procedure. It began on June, 18 1996 when the Commission adopted two legislative proposals known hereafter as the Auto Oil I proposals (Commission of the European Communities, 1996). The Commission in preparation embarked upon a two-year research programme (Auto Oil I) with the European level organisations representing the automobile manufacturers and the oil industry (the Association of European Automobile Constructors (ACEA) and the European Petroleum Industry Association (EUROPIA) respectively). The Auto Oil I Programme sought:

to provide policy-makers with an objective assessment of the most cost-effective package of measures including vehicle technology, fuel quality, improved durability and non-technical measures, necessary to reduce emissions from the road transport sector to a level consistent with the attainment of the new air quality standards being developed for adoption

¹ This case study is part of a wider project examining patterns of interest group collaboration at the EU level. Interviews were the main instrument of primary data collection and the majority were conducted in 1996.

across the European Union (Commission of the European Communities, A, p.3).

The Programme was the first of its kind; never before had the Commission engaged interest groups in this type of arrangement. More than this, the Auto Oil I Programme reflected the EU's new approach for dealing with road transport emissions. Following widespread consultation the Commission devised a new policy approach, the details of which were set out officially in the 1994 directive on motor vehicle emissions (European Communities, 1994). The directive lists a number of measures to be addressed by future emissions legislation, including vehicle technology and improvements in fuel quality. In addition, the directive linked future emission standards to European air quality standards and the application of cost effectiveness criteria to any technical and non-technical measures proposed to curb this source of air pollution. This marks a departure from the best available technology approach of the previous three decades. The Auto Oil I Programme was instigated to identify and investigate potential measures capable of reducing road transport emissions in accordance with stringent EU air quality standards and in a cost-effective manner. The findings from this large-scale research Programme would provide "a solid technical foundation upon which the Commission could build its future strategy" (Commission of the European Communities, B, p.4).

ACEA and EUROPIA together with the Commission (particularly the industry, environment and energy Directorates General (DGs)) planned and executed the Auto Oil I Programme. By including ACEA and EUROPIA the Commission brought together industries that traditionally adopt opposing positions on the road transport emissions issue. The time-scale and complexity of the task demanded a considerable investment from each Auto Oil partner. Involvement in the Auto Oil I Programme placed the two industries in an influential position regarding the development of future legislation. ACEA and EUROPIA were invited to participate in the Programme to share their subject knowledge and expertise and create the technical basis for developing the EU's vehicle emissions policy and policy instruments. Legislation to combat emissions invariably makes demands upon the automobile and oil industries to develop products that will meet increasingly stringent standards. This requires substantial investment and gives the industries additional scope for influencing policy developments because policy-makers must consider the economic feasibility of vehicle modifications and improved fuel quality. The public interests that collaborated over the case study issue felt that these industries wielded considerable influence over the preparations for the Auto Oil I proposals. Their concerns are examined below.

Following the Commission's agreement on the Auto Oil I proposals in June 1996, ACEA, EUROPIA and other interest groups prepared their initial responses. The immediate reactions of the Auto Oil partners contrasted sharply. Despite their intensive co-operation during the Auto Oil I Programme the partners appeared to revert to their old positions. Initial responses from the public interest groups followed. The *ECCA* responded to the Auto Oil I proposals in 1997.

2.2 The *ECCA* coalition ~ activities and characteristics

The coalition campaigned "to achieve tighter EU emission standards and other measures to combat pollution by motor vehicles by the year 2000" (European Bureau

of Consumer Unions (BEUC) et al, 1995, p.1).² The *ECCA* questioned several aspects of the Commission's new approach to emissions, including *inter alia* the introduction of a cost-effectiveness analysis for potential measures to combat the problem. The exclusive participation of ACEA and EUROPIA in the Programme and the resulting lack of consultation with other interests was another contentious matter which led the coalition to demand a "more balanced consultation of all interests involved" (European Bureau of Consumer Unions (BEUC), 1995, p.2).

The Commission served as the institutional focus of the coalition's campaign during the preparatory stage. The case study data reveal the *ECCA*'s efforts to enter the policy debate over future vehicle emission standards. The members paid considerable attention to the Auto Oil I Programme and expressed their concerns about *inter alia* its rationale and operation to the Commission (see below). In addition, the coalition organised conferences (with contributions from the EU institutions and interest groups, academics, national government officials and air quality consultants) issued statements and press releases on policy developments, and sent letters to the EU institutions and member states.

The *ECCA* is an example of a temporary, issue-driven coalition. Its focus on clean air incorporated two related issues, vehicle emissions and air quality. In Loomis' (1986, p.) terminology its short-term, dual issue characteristics places the *ECCA* in the complex coalition category. As a coalition of public interests, the *ECCA* brought together a range of group. Clearly there are differences between the environmental, consumer and citizen groups within the *ECCA*, not least the policy areas they usually work in and their subject expertise. Yet, their collaboration over the emissions issue does not suggest a coalition of "truly strange bedfellows" (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986, p.48). Issues with an environmental dimension cut across sectors. Moreover, the coalition's interest in the health implications of vehicle emissions had widespread appeal. Hence, the *ECCA* compares with interest group coalitions whose members "share more than their stake in a particular policy decision" (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986, p.48).

The most striking features of the *ECCA* coalition are its official status and informal structure. The *ECCA* was intended as a Europe-wide campaign and as such provided the six core European level members with an official name and platform. It is important to note that the *ECCA Memorandum* (European Bureau of Consumer Unions (BEUC) et al, 1995), and other campaign literature bore both the name of the coalition and the names and logos of the European level members. Consequently, the members of the coalition were always visible. The *ECCA*'s organisational structure fits Schlozman and Tierney's (1986) usual pattern of collaboration where members contribute what resources (financial or otherwise) they can. According to the list of criteria (see section 1.1) the *ECCA* had no formal structure: no system for financial contributions, no permanent secretariat co-ordinating the coalition's work, and no set schedule for meetings. The absence of these features identifies the *ECCA* as an informally organised coalition.

The division of responsibilities within the *ECCA* confirms its informal, flexible nature. It was determined in part by the expertise of the member groups. For example, the EEB and T&E were the obvious candidates for addressing the environmental aspects of the issue. The level of participation within the coalition varied among the members. One member had an initiating and co-ordinating role. Indeed, it

² The *ECCA* includes new European directives on air quality stemming from the framework directive on ambient air quality (European Communities, 1996) as part of its clean air platform. The case study focuses on the new emissions standards for motor vehicles.

approached the other groups during the Auto Oil I Programme. Four groups (including the founding member) formed the nucleus of the coalition during the preparatory stage and were the most active members throughout this initial period.³

Several *ECCA* members recorded their intentions to work on the Auto Oil I proposals outside the coalition framework, as individual actors or with any other groups that share their policy positions. The second *Memorandum (European Campaign for Clean Air (ECCA), 1997)* on the Auto Oil I proposals confirmed the flexible nature of the coalition by acknowledging, accommodating and reinforcing the individual activities of its members. The opportunity for the *ECCA* members to pursue their own agendas while working collaboratively confirms the informal structure and flexible nature of the coalition.

2.3 How important are issues in encouraging groups to collaborate?

Given that the paper regards collaboration as a strategy for achieving public policy goals, it anticipates that members will exhibit some degree of commitment to the public policy issues addressed by the coalition. The collective incentive for collaborating is the strategic, policy-oriented benefits to be had from acting in concert. Hula (1999, 1995) identifies different levels of membership participation in coalitions. Of the three levels, core members bear the start-up costs of the coalition and display highest level of commitment to the achievement of public policy goals (Hula, 1995, p.250). Specialists or players are second level participants (Hula, 1995, p.250). These groups are also keen to pursue policy goals and bring knowledge and expertise to the coalition. Their objectives are more limited than core members because they tend to concentrate on particular aspects of policy. Specialists respond to collective incentives and more particularly the opportunity to mould the policy goals of the coalition (Hula, 1995, p.250). Peripheral groups (Hula, 1995, p.250) are less interested in collective incentives than the other members and take a less active role in the coalition (Hula, 1995, p.250). They respond to selective incentives (Hula, 1995, p.250-251). This model suggests that commitment to public policy goals can vary among coalition partners. If the pull of collective incentives varies from one member to another, it follows that some groups are more likely to collaborate in response to the issue than other groups.

Different levels of participation were evident among the coalition members. Yet, there was general acknowledgement of the strategic benefits from adopting a collaborative strategy and by implication a majority of members similarly recognised the importance of the emissions issue. Several groups intended to act outside the coalition during the legislative stage. This suggests that an issue of primary importance (Berry, 1989) can encourage collaboration as long as the collaborative action complements members' individual (and other) strategies.

The vehicle emissions issue is a suitable candidate for investigating whether the complexity of an issue influences collaborative behaviour. Issue complexity refers to the ability of groups to understand an issue (Loomis, 1986). The Auto Oil partners and *ECCA* members alike acknowledged the multifaceted nature of the new policy and regulatory approach to combating air pollution from motor vehicles.

³ For a discussion of different levels of participation within interest coalitions see Hula (1999, 1995).

The case study data suggest that some groups were more able to comprehend the intricacies and technical aspects of the issue than others. For example, the environmental interests have considerable expertise in this area. On the strength of its previous record on this issue and institutional access, a positive assessment can be made about the EEB's level of issue comprehension and ability to campaign individually for stringent emission standards. As the environmental group specialising in transport issues T&E enjoys a comparable level of understanding and ability to address the issue as its environmental *ECCA* partner.

The position of a third coalition member presents contrasting evidence and indicates the potential influence of this factor upon collaborative behaviour. Unlike its environmental partners, this group brought relatively little subject knowledge or issue experience to the *ECCA*. In spite of its considerable interest in the issue, the group admitted that it lacked the expertise to address emission standards without assistance. Comparing these three members, it is evident that the level of understanding and ability to address the issue varied among the *ECCA* groups. This implies that issue complexity did not have the same effect throughout the coalition.

Loomis asserts that coalitions can influence how much public attention an issue receives (1986, p.267). Interest groups who "make the issues accessible, and important, to the appropriate constituencies" (Loomis, 1986, p.268) bring issues to a wide audience. The *ECCA* groups did not participate in the Auto Oil I Programme and demanded greater access on the basis of the public's right to know about the health and environmental implications of air pollution caused by motor vehicle emissions. Several groups were aware of how popular the public health angle was and were keen to exploit this. This suggests a positive response to this factor. One group mentioned its support for the Europe-wide nature of the *ECCA* linking organisations at the local and national level to the European level. This is another example of how the coalition planned to bring the issue to the attention of the public.

A majority of members referred to the importance of the issue. For the coalition's founding group the issue was central to its rationale for instigating the collaboration. Given the expertise of most members, it is unlikely that they collaborated to increase their understanding of the issue. It is more likely that the opportunity to address comprehensively the complex, multifaceted issue met with a favourable response. The coalition's ability to raise public awareness appears to have had a similar effect upon some groups.

2.4 How important are opposition interests for encouraging groups to collaborate?

The case study is an appropriate test for the proposition that an organised opposition encourages collaboration. Traditionally the automobile and oil industries are the organised opposition on the issue of vehicle emissions. Although the Auto Oil I Programme emphasised their potential influence over the emissions standards for 2000, it is merely one of many opportunities afforded to the industries since regulation began at the European level. Industry involvement was significant when best available technology provided the benchmark for emissions standards. Essentially, the Commission set the standards according to industry assessments of achievable technological developments. The industries enjoyed rather more than institutional access - they exerted considerable influence as well.

The automobile and oil industries possess technical knowledge and expertise required for policy (and legislative) development. The role of the Oil Companies' European Organisation for Environmental, Health and Safety (CONCAWE) confirms the expert status of the oil industry. CONCAWE is the industry's European organisation for health, safety and the environment. Unlike EUROPIA, CONCAWE has no political (representation) function to detract from its scientific and economic research activities. Its interest in vehicle emissions began in the early 1980s when the link between fuel properties and emissions performance was recognised. Its research informs the industry and the EU institutions. Knowledge and expertise is an important resource but it is not the only bargaining chip in the industries' hands. They have economic resources. The automobile industry is a large employer and the oil industry is one of the staples of the modern economy. Economic resources strengthen their influencing position, "because such resources are indispensable to the welfare of Europe" (Greenwood, 1997, p.18).

As noted above DG Industry is the portfolio leader within the Commission for the regulation of vehicle emissions. This sets the two industries at an additional advantage in terms of access and influence despite the higher profile of other DGs (notably DG Environment) because of the new, integrated air quality and vehicle emissions approach epitomised by the Auto Oil I Programme. The Auto Oil I Programme placed ACEA and EUROPIA in an enviable position as partners with the Commission. To identify the most cost-effective package of measures to reduce vehicle emissions in line with new air quality standards, the Auto Oil partners were confronted with a major undertaking, not least because of the restricted time-scale. The result was intensive co-operation between the industries' representatives and the Commission, guaranteeing industry involvement from the earliest stage in the policy process.

For an organised opposition to stimulate collaboration the groups must perceive the potential threat. The enduring involvement of the automobile and oil industries in the vehicle emissions issue, the institutional access they enjoy and their resources informed the judgement of the ECCA members. The Auto Oil I Programme provided further confirmation that ACEA and EUROPIA were strong opposition, not least because the Programme excluded other interested (institutional and non-institutional) actors and gave the industries the opportunity to participate in the early stages of the policy process. The strength of the opposition was reinforced by its perceived influence upon the Commission's preliminary emission standards produced in December 1995. Comparing the December standards with those advanced in the Auto Oil I proposals, the ECCA members attributed the changes to industry pressure on the Commission.

The automobile and oil industries continued as the organised opposition after the publication of the Auto Oil I proposals in June 1996. They also appeared to be in a particularly strong position thanks to the Auto Oil I Programme and the associated benefits from being Auto Oil partners. The extent to which ACEA and EUROPIA encouraged the members of the ECCA to collaborate is difficult to discern. Much criticism was levelled at the Auto Oil I Programme and the Commission for initiating it. As partners in the Programme ACEA and EUROPIA were treated in a similar fashion. It is plausible to interpret ECCA member comments about the Auto Oil I Programme as including the automobile and oil industries as well as the Commission. The first *ECCA Memorandum* (European Bureau of Consumer Unions (BEUC) et al, 1995) supports this interpretation by referring to the bond between the Auto Oil partners:

Our campaign has come together because we are concerned about the extent to which this process has become institutionalised in a Tripartite - Commission and the two industries concerned - virtually excluding other interests such as the smaller producers at the cutting edge of environmental technology, let alone the groups we represent (European Bureau of Consumer Unions (BEUC) et al, 1995, p.2).

There is some evidence to support the idea that the organised opposition influenced how the *ECCA* groups collaborated. The *ECCA* was a broad coalition that sought to transcend levels of governance by including public interests from the trans-national level to the local level. The coalition responded to the multifaceted nature of the issue by augmenting the scope of the vehicle emissions debate (Loomis, 1986) to link the issue to air quality and highlight its public health, environmental and consumer aspects. Broadening the scope of the issue can also be seen as a way of counteracting the dominance of the organised opposition within the policy process. By bringing a range of public interests together and linking actors at the European, national and local levels the coalition sought to augment its potential influence upon the EU institutions. One *ECCA* member noted that the coalition would have a greater impact if it included organisations representing medical and health professionals. This did not happen during the data collection stage of the case study research. The coalition had a flexible structure enabling the more active members to act individually as well as collectively. The same member commented on the importance of matching the lobbying efforts of the industries by encouraging as many actors as possible to communicate the same position. With many voices espousing the same message the groups hoped to balance the efforts of the oil and automobile industries. This is indicative of the influence of the organised opposition on the actions of the coalition.

2.5 How important are the EU institutions and the institutional landscape for encouraging groups to collaborate?

The Commission and the Auto Oil I Programme provided the institutional focus for the members of the *ECCA* coalition. Walker's (1991) research on group formation and maintenance identifies the role of patrons (including government agencies) who provide groups with financial and organisational support. There is evidence of patronage from the Commission and the European Parliament for the *ECCA* coalition because both institutions sponsored an *ECCA* conference. Moreover, the coalition members noted the favourable reaction of the Commission to the *ECCA* because it recognised the groups' desire to be included in the preparations for the Auto-Oil I proposals and regarded the public interest groups as the link between EU citizens and their views on the issue. However, there is no case study evidence that the institutions contributed directly to the creation of the *ECCA* coalition by encouraging the public interest groups to collaborate.

There is some evidence to suggest that the EU institutions contributed indirectly to the creation of the *ECCA* coalition through the Auto Oil I Programme. Adopting a new institutionalist perspective and Bulmer's (1998) inclusive definition, the Auto Oil I Programme can be considered as an institution in its own right. The Programme, more specifically its impact upon interest group access to the initial stages of the

policy process, was one of the reasons advanced by the *ECCA*'s founding group to explain why it initiated the collaboration. The founding group viewed the Auto Oil I Programme as augmenting industry access to the Commission and by implication increasing industry influence within the policy process. The coalition founder felt that public interest groups should counterbalance the impact of the automobile and oil industries and decided to create the coalition partly in response to the Programme. Several coalition members shared similar concerns, particularly the exclusive involvement of ACEA and EUROPIA in the Programme and the general disparity between private and public interests regarding institutional access on this issue.

Despite their exclusion from the Auto Oil I Programme, the *ECCA* members attended several meetings with Commission officials from the environment DG during the Auto Oil I Programme.⁴ The case study data also indicate contact between the Commission and the coalition members following the conclusion of the Programme and presentation of the preliminary emission standards in December 1995. The coalition members felt that the preliminary standards were less stringent as a result of intensive lobbying by the oil and automobile industries. Several *ECCA* groups believed the Commission would welcome their input to balance the arguments advanced by industry.

Any possible influence the EU institutions had on collaborative behaviour was indirect, derived from circumstances created by the Commission and the Auto Oil I Programme rather than a conscious attempt on their part to promote collaborative action among the public interest groups. An awareness of developments within the institutional landscape, and the interaction between the Commission and the *ECCA* groups, makes it easier to understand the concerns of the *ECCA* members during the Auto Oil I Programme. The Commission's new policy approach appeared to mean less involvement for the public interest groups.

3. How do public interests collaborate and what encourages them to create and join coalitions?

The *ECCA* coalition is an example of a temporary, issue based alliance between public interests that share a specific public policy goal. Its most striking characteristic is its informal organisational structure and flexible nature which enabled the members to act outside the coalition to influence the EU's policy to combat air pollution from motor vehicles. As the Auto Oil I proposals moved to the legislative stage, the *ECCA* members were joined in their endeavours by private interests, including the European level organisations representing the automobile and tourism associations (Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) and Association Internationale de Tourisme (AIT)), and individual automobile manufacturers (Friedrich, Tappe and Wurzel, 2000, p.608; Warleigh, 2000). This confirms the coalition's flexible nature which enabled it to adapt to new circumstances and include new members whose policy goals coincided with those of the *ECCA*. Warleigh's (2000) research on policy coalitions goes beyond interest

⁴ It is important to note that the Commission might view the exclusive nature of the Auto Oil I Programme rather differently from the *ECCA* members: "The Commission retrospectively tried to legitimize its close (and closed) co-operation with the automobile and oil industries with reference to the principle of shared responsibility (...) as outlined in the Fifth Environmental Action Programme (EAP) ... However, ..., the 'tripartite dialogue' did not actually reflect the principle of shared responsibility" (Friedrich, Tappe and Wurzel, 2000, pp.598-599).

group collaboration to investigate the issue based alliances that form between institutional and non-institutional actors at the EU level. He notes that the public interest groups co-operated with industry actors and several member states over the Auto Oil I proposals (Warleigh, 2000, p.233). This shows the ability of public and private groups to work together and extend their collective action to institutional actors to further shared policy goals. Moreover, it would have been difficult for the public interest groups to extend their collaboration if the *ECCA* coalition had not been a flexible arrangement. Perhaps future research should include coalition characteristics as a factor for encouraging the creation and membership of interest group coalitions. At the very least, coalitions that are flexible enable members to tailor their involvement according to their other commitments.

Regarding the list of external factors with the potential to encourage collaborative behaviour, the case study provides no conclusive evidence to confirm the extent to which issues, opposition interests or the EU institutions influenced the actions of the *ECCA* members. This points to the need for further investigation of these factors and consideration of the internal factors outlined in section 1.2. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw a number of preliminary conclusions from the case study.

If issues beget coalitions (Berry, 1989) it might be assumed that collaborating groups will have some regard for the policy issues pursued by the coalitions they join. While Berry (1989) argues that groups are more likely to collaborate over non-priority issues, Hula (1999, 1995) notes that the importance of the policy issue (and the furtherance of policy goals) differs among coalition members. The case study data reveal the coalition members' recognition of the importance of the policy issue. The data also indicate the need to investigate the potential influence of complex issues and ability of coalitions to bring issues to a wider audience (Loomis, 1986) and highlight particular aspects on the actions of some groups.

The case study issue proved an appropriate test for an examination of opposition interests. An organised opposition in the shape of the automobile and oil industries persisted and gained strength during the policy development stage as a result of the level of institutional access afforded by the Auto Oil I Programme. While the *ECCA* members perceived the strength of ACEA and EUROPIA, the case study data do not reveal the extent to which these industries encouraged collaboration. However, there is some evidence to support the idea that the organised opposition influenced the nature and actions of the *ECCA* coalition. Both aspects merit further consideration.

The Commission and the Auto Oil I Programme provided the institutional focus for the *ECCA* coalition. There is some evidence to suggest the indirect influence of these institutions on the founding group's decision to create the *ECCA*. Indeed, the coalition sought to challenge the exclusive nature of the Auto Oil I Programme. Further research on the EU institutions should extend the case study issue to the legislative stage of the policy process and examine the potential influence of other institutions (including the European Parliament and co-decision procedure) on collaborative behaviour.

The case study reveals a specific pattern of informal, flexible collaboration. It also demonstrates the applicability of a range of ideas from the literature on interest coalitions, interest representation and new institutionalism to an examination of the ways in which public interests collaborate and the factors that encourage them to act collectively. The challenge is to build upon this foundation to add to this particular

pattern of collaboration and investigate more fully the factors influencing collaborative behaviour among public interest groups.

References

Baggott, R. (1995) *Pressure groups today*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Berry, J. M. (1989) *The interest group society*. 2nd edition. Glenview, Illinois, Scott, Foresman and Company. Scott, Foresman/Little Brown Series in Political Science.

Biliouri, D. (1999) 'Environmental NGOs in Brussels: how powerful are their lobbying activities?'. *Environmental Politics*, 8, 2, pp.173-182.

Bulmer, S. J. (1993) 'The governance of the European Union: a new institutionalist approach'. *Journal of Public Policy*, 13, 4, pp.351-380.

Bulmer, S. J. (1998) 'New institutionalism and the governance of the Single European Market'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 5, 3, pp.365-386.

Commission of the European Communities (1996) *Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive relating to the quality of petrol and diesel fuels and amending Council Directive 93/12/EEC and Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive relating to measures to be taken against air pollution by emissions from motor vehicles and amending Council Directives 70/156/EEC and 70/220/EEC, COM (96) 248, final*. OJ No C77, 11.3.1997, p.1.

Commission of the European Communities (A) *The European Auto Oil programme: a report by the European Commission Directorate Generals for: Industry; Environment, Civil Protection and Nuclear Safety; and Energy*. Brussels, Commission of the European Communities. (No date of publication.)

Commission of the European Communities (B) *The European Auto Oil programme. Commission Services DG III, DG XI, DG XVII*. Brussels, Commission of the European Communities. (No date of publication.)

European Bureau of Consumer Unions (BEUC), European Environmental Bureau (EEB), European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), European Federation for Transport and Environmental (T&E), Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Community (COFACE) and the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) (1995) *Memorandum By: The European Campaign for Clean Air: new EU pollution standards for motor vehicles and air quality directives*. Brussels, BEUC, EEB, EPHA, T&E, COFACE, ECAS.

European Campaign for Clean Air (ECCA) (1997) Memorandum on the European Commission's Auto-oil proposals. Brussels, ECCA.

European Communities (1994) *European Parliament and Council Directive 94/12/EC of 23 March 1994 relating to measures to be taken against air pollution by emissions from motor vehicles and amending Directive 70/220/EEC*. OJ No L100, 19.4.1994, p.42.

European Communities (1996) *Council Directive 96/62/EC of 27 September 1996 on ambient air quality assessment and management*. OJ No L296, 21.11.1996, p.55.

European Communities (1998) *Directive 98/69/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 October 1998 relating to measures to be taken against air pollution by emissions from motor vehicles and amending Council Directive 70/220/EEC and Directive 98/70/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 October 1998 relating to the quality of petrol and diesel fuels and amending Directive 93/12/EEC*. OJ No L350, 28.12.1998, p.1.

Friedrich, A., Tappe, M. and Wurzel, R. K. W. (2000) 'A new approach to EU environmental policy-making? The Auto-Oil I Programme'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 7, 4, pp.593-612.

Grant, W., Matthews, D. and Newell, P. (2000) *The Effectiveness of European Union Environmental Policy*. Basingstoke, Macmillan.

Greenwood, J. (1997) *Representing interests in the European Union*. Basingstoke, Macmillan.

Hojnacki, M. (1997) 'Interest groups' decisions to join alliances or work alone'. *American Journal of Political Science*, 41, 1, pp.61-87.

Hula, K. (1995) 'Rounding up the usual suspects: forging interest group coalitions in Washington'. IN: Cigler, A. J. and Loomis, B. A. eds. *Interest group politics*. 4th edition. Washington D.C., Congressional Quarterly Press, pp.239-258.

Hula, K. W. (1999) *Lobbying together: interest group coalitions in legislative politics*. Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press.

Loomis, B. A. (1986) 'Coalitions of interests: building bridges in the balkanized state'. IN: Cigler, A. J. and Loomis, B. A. eds. *Interest group politics*. 2nd edition. Washington, D.C., Congressional Quarterly Press, pp.258-274.

Pijnenburg, B. (1998) 'EU lobbying by *ad hoc* coalitions: an exploratory case study'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 5, 2, pp.303-321.

Rucht, D. (1993) "'Think globally, act locally"? Needs, forms and problems of cross-national cooperation among environmental groups'. IN: Liefferink, J. D., Lowe, P. D. and Mol, A. P. J. eds. *European integration and environmental policy*. London, Belhaven Press, pp.75-95.

Schlozman, K. L. and Tierney, J. T. (1986) *Organized interests and American democracy*. New York, Harper and Row.

Thelen, K. and Steinmo, S. (1992) 'Historical institutionalism in comparative politics'. IN: Steinmo, S., Thelen, K. and Longstreth, F. eds. *Structuring politics: historical institutionalism in comparative analysis*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp.1-32.

Walker, J. L. (1991) *Mobilizing interest groups in America: patrons, professions, and social movements*. Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press.

Warleigh, A. (2000) 'The hustle: citizenship practice, NGOs and 'policy coalitions' in the European Union - the cases of Auto Oil, drinking water and unit pricing'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 7, 2, pp.229-243.

Webster, R. (1998) 'Environmental collective action: stable patterns of cooperation and issue alliances at the European level'. IN: Greenwood, J. and Aspinwall, M. eds. *Collective action in the European Union: interests and the new politics of associability*. London, Routledge, pp.176-195.

Webster, R. (2000) 'What drives interest group collaboration at the EU level? Evidence from the European environmental interest groups' *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)*, 4, 17 (<http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2000-017a.htm>).