POLICY-MAKING STYLES IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY: CONSULTATION OF GROUPS AND THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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As power shifts to Brussels and Strasbourg, few policy areas are not subject to some degree of EC influence. As a result, most major interests in Western Europe are now mobilised to influence policy-making at the European level. In particular, interest group activity appears to be concentrated on bureaucratic structures at the European level—from the Commission itself to technical standards setting bodies. Even though the rules of the game for lobbyists are rather similar to those at the national level, the EC policy process if still unpredictable, particularly in terms of setting the policy agenda. There are, however, signs that some models of national policy-making, particularly those based upon the analysis of policy communities and policy networks, may have some applications at the EC level. Following Lehmbruch, it is argued that the Commission is playing an important role in the institutionalisation of network configurations. The evolution of stable sectoral networks is still underway, but this process is a reflection of a long Western-European tradition of the integration of interest groups into policy-making and implementing processes.

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1. Introduction: A New Locus of Power and its Implications for Lobbying

Irrespective of the arguments which may rage over precise terminological definitions of the European Community (EC), its development into some form of 'quasi' federal state is now an accepted aspect of politics in Western Europe. In particular, the nature of the EC decision-making process is of growing concern to students of comparative public policy. If one is analysing the policy process in any one of the twelve EC Member States and of several others such as Sweden and Norway, it is impossible not to take account of the influence of the EC. Equally, the role of the EC as an international actor is of increasing relevance in the whole field of international political economy and in such areas as global environmental policies. In practice, as power shifts to Brussels and Strasbourg, few policy areas—whether domestic or international—are not subject to some degree of EC influence.

As always, shifts in power are noted and acted upon by interest groups. They quickly retarget their influence, once they realise that the power to take decisions which affect them has moved to a new institution or to new actors. Whilst there is differential recognition by groups of the significance of the EC, and different policy sectors exhibit differing degrees of EC influence, it is now difficult to find a major interest in Western Europe which is not mobilised to influence policy-making at the European level. Not only is there a high degree of interest mobilisation generally, but it is also very clear that interests are developing lobbying strategies rather similar to those adopted at the national level. In particular, there appears to be a concentration on bureaucratic structures at the

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European level—from the EC Commission itself to highly technical standards setting bodies. The Commission is the primary 'target'. Although it may be described as an 'adolescent' bureaucracy, its remit now runs wide and its role in the continuing process of European integration is crucial.

These changes in the distribution of power between the Member States and the European Community have prompted a proliferation of interest group lobbying at the EC level. Whilst the phenomenon of European lobbying is not at all new, there has in recent years been a sharp increase in the number of national and European level groups attempting to influence EC policy. There has also been a considerable increase in the levels of resources devoted to influencing both the formulation and, more recently, the implementation of EC policy. However, the degree of resource mobilisation by groups varies considerably, with business and agricultural groups by far the best resourced and most heavily represented. Although the development of EC lobbying is now well recognised, it is more difficult to produce a coherent characterisation of the nature of the relationship between interest groups and decision-makers both at the European level itself and at the national levels where much 'Euro-lobbying' takes place. Whilst some interests have managed to become part of an identifiable relatively restructured policy community at the EC level, most are involved in ill-defined and rather loose policy networks. These differences in policy-making styles within the EC can be explained to some extent by the particular characteristics of different policy sectors (as they can at the national level). However, as highlighted below, the structural characteristics which underpin the EC policy-making process also inhibit the establishment of stable policy communities which are so familiar in such countries as Britain, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany.

The peculiar features of EC policy-making also have important implications for the European Community itself, not least for those European Commission

officials whose task is to manage the increasingly time-consuming business of group consultation. Despite the popular belief in bureaucratic expansion, the EC has less than three and a half thousand senior administrators who are collectively responsible for the drafting of EC policies. The extension of the Community's sphere of competence and the resultant explosion in European lobbying has inevitably imposed considerable strains upon the administration. For EC officials charged with the task of reconciling the interests of numerous groups from twelve member states, the Single European Act (SEA) has particularly underlined the need for the Community to seek to develop a manageable and stable set of interactions with interest groups. Moreover, they have to take account of the pressures exerted by the governments and interests of non-member and aspirant member states. The nature of interest intermediation at the EC level is thus in a state of flux; whilst groups seek to develop new strategies for effective EC lobbying, EC policy-makers face the increasingly difficult task of managing the consultation, information exchange, and implementation problems associated with the accelerating pace of European integration. Moreover, the system of consultation is made more problematic by the uncertainty surrounding the future pattern of the EC policy process itself. For example, changes in the role of the European Parliament (EP), attempts to realise in practice the concept of subsidiarity, and the possibility of opening up the Council of Ministers to more direct public influence (as the Danes seem to be demanding in the Maastricht 'renegotiations') may disrupt the steady development of a stable pattern of interactions between organised interests and policy-makers.

2. **System Characteristics: Competing Institutions and Unpredictable Agendas**

At a generalised level, it is correct to argue that the unwritten rules of the lobbying within the EC are very similar to those long established at national

level. As we have argued elsewhere (Mazey and Richardson: 1992a, 1993a), the most successful groups are those that exhibit the usual professional characteristics—namely sufficient resources, good advance intelligence of intended policy change, and strong contacts with bureaucrats and politicians. *Above all,* they have an ability to provide policy-makers with sound technical advice which will enable them to solve policy formulation and policy delivery problems. A system of exchange relationships with bureaucrats must be developed, based upon mutual trust over a period of time. (Jordan and Richardson 1982) The key resource for any group is, ultimately, a reputation for expertise and reliability.

If the 'what gains influence?' question is relatively easy to answer , the "how to gain influence' is more problematic. The EC policy process is unique. Its multi-national, neo-federal nature, the openness of decision-making processes to lobbyists, and the considerable weight of national politico-administrative elites within the process, create an unstable and multi-dimensional environment to which all pressure groups must adapt if they are to achieve their objectives. A primary characteristic of this rather fluid decision-making process, in which the power relations between even the key institutions are not yet stabilised, is that the policy agenda in most sectors is very unpredictable. In political systems where policies are to some degree initiated and processed by a well defined and stable group of actors—typified by the policy community model of the UK developed by Richardson and Jordan in the late 1970s (Richardson and Jordan 1979)—the main affected interests are generally aware of the possibility of policy changes rather early in the process, when influence can be brought to bear most effectively. The overwhelming response from interests interviewed by us in a range of policy sectors is that they find the EC's policy agenda to be much less predictable. Consequently, the resources needed for effective agenda monitoring are beyond the reach of all but the wealthiest industrial interests, such as multi-

national companies. Such companies can afford to devote the necessary resources in terms of personnel to adopt a multi-track approach to information gathering and to actual lobbying. 'Brussels watching' essentially entails an almost blanket approach to information gathering from within the Commission and its many Directorates and Divisions, (and in certain policy areas and for certain issues the EP), as well as a continued monitoring of policy developments at the national level. The latter is necessary because national agendas and solutions can quite quickly become Euro-agendas and solutions. In that sense, the EC policy process might be a rather good (or bad!) example of the March and Olsen 'garbage can' model of decision-making in which problems are looking for solutions, and solutions are looking for problems. (March and Olsen 1976). Moreover, the competition for policy space is almost certainly much more intense at the European level, with a complex game being played between the various EC institutions such as the Commission (and within the Commission), the Council of Ministers, the EP, the European Court, the Court of Auditors, the twelve Member States, between the EC collectively and its member states, and between the now thousands of interest groups operating at the European level—many of whom are from outside the EC itself.

As at the national level, the EC also illustrates the normal problems of jurisdictional disputes between different parts of what is supposed to be a unified bureaucracy (the Commission) and the usual problems caused by the difficulty of achieving horizontal co-ordination across related policy sectors. A classic example is the lack of co-ordination between DG XI (Environment) and DG XVI (Regional Affairs). As a recent Court of Auditors report has suggested, a number of departments and DGs have responsibility for specific aspects of environmental policy. ..It concluded that "This spread of responsibility requires substantial co-ordination, which is far from having been achieved". (Court of Auditors, 1992, p. 6). This strong criticism (echoed by environmental groups) has

lead to changes in co-ordination procedures and to a widening of the network of actors to be consulted by DG XVI in the formulation of proposals for the implementation of the new Cohesion Fund (Mazey and Richardson, 1993b). Whereas at the national level there are usually unified recruitment and training procedures, with bureaucrats drawn from a pool of recruits from a common cultural and educational background, the EC has not yet created a unified bureaucratic ideology or operational style. Quite simply, the Commission does not at present practise anything like the 'standard operating procedures' which are usual in Britain and Scandinavia, for instance, for the managing of the interface between groups and government. Such procedures are being developed by several parts of the Commission, but as yet are without central direction, in the absence of a unified organisational culture. The Commission is undoubtedly a multi-faceted organisation, with much greater internal variation than is normal in national bureaucracies. Indeed, the Commission is an example of Ripley and Franklin's observation that "The central point is that bureaucrats' personal and organisation attitudes toward the content and goals of programs are important factors that have a major impact on implementation". (Ripley and Franklin 1986, p. 41). One of the most common errors made by other policy actors (e.g. interest groups, regional authorities) in dealing with the Commission is that they develop a generalised view of "the" Commission from their experiences with one division or section of a Directorate General, or indeed with one official. In practice, the 'rules of the game' can shift quite radically from one division or unit to the next and can be re-written if a function is taken over by an official from a different nationality. As one industrial respondent put it to us "... there is quite a different 'flavour' from one D-G to the next".

An equally significant system characteristic is that the other main 'pillar' of any system of regularised consultation between policy-makers and the affected interests is still manifestly weak and under developed—namely the hundreds of

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'Euro-groups'. It is now conventional wisdom that many if not most of the Euro-groups are under-resourced, inexpert, slow to react and, above all, so seriously factionalised that they can articulate only what have come to be regarded as 'lowest common denominator' positions to EC policy-makers. (In fact what this term really means is that the highest common denominator is rather low!). The reasons for the patchy development of interest articulation and representation structures, which are essential to the emergence of a genuinely *European* (or at least EC) level process of interest intermediation, are all perfectly understandable. For example, the structure of the interests at the national level in the twelve Member States is often very different, reflecting quite different sectoral arrangements in each country. The radically different structures of financial and capital markets is a typical example, causing often severe difficulties in developing an effective Euro-level representative structure (see Knight et al 1993). A necessary pre-condition for the emergence of effective European level assocational structures is a reasonable level of mutual self-interest and willingness to co-operate, and willingness to make sacrifices in the common interests of the group. Where potential or actual members of Euro-level groups are in such intense competition with each other in the marketplace and—equally importantly—where there exist alternative lobbying options to participating in a Euro-group—it is not surprising that many European federations simply do not work effectively as channels of interest group representation. As McLaughlin argues, models of European integration continue to underestimate the intra-organisational difficulties faced by Euro-groups and the damaging effects to these groups of the multiple strategies adopted by larger companies (McLaughlin 1992). In some sectors (e.g. for parts of the chemical industry) a coherent and reasonably effective system of European level representation has developed , but for the majority this development is still at an early stage, with variations from sector to sector. Even in the chemicals case, it has taken a long time for CEFIC (European Chemical Industry Council) to reach a relatively high level of lobbying

efficiency, and this appears to have been achieved by the creation of dozens of specialised sectoral groups. Thus, in this case at least, there has been a very clear trend towards specialisation within the Euro-association, thus enabling it to mobilise technical, coherent advice more quickly and with less likelihood of having to build very broad coalitions across the industry as a whole. Yet influence is not simply a function of wealth and complex organisational structure. In the environmental sector, as we shall argue below, special factors present some environmental groups with certain advantages over the more highly resourced industrial lobbyists, with whom they are often in competition. The unpredictable and unstable EC agenda setting process presents some special opportunities to groups who may find it difficult to disturb the strongly entrenched distributional coalitions often found at the national level.

3. A Pragmatic Style Emerges?

Whatever emerges from the growing debate concerning the democratic deficit in the EC, and whatever compromise is devised to rescue the Maastricht Treaty, the Commission is likely to remain the key actor so far as lobbyists are concerned. It is no accident that virtually every analysis of pressure group activity in Western democracies has identified the bureaucracy as the key target of group influence (Richardson: 1993). Politicians (and occasionally citizens) may be important in determining what politics is about, but nothing much can happen unless they are served by a technically competent bureaucracy, able and willing to translate ideology and ideas into public policies and programmes As the European Community is unlikely to be able to devise a new system of modern government in which politicians do not depend heavily upon bureaucrats, the Commission will remain at the centre of the policy-making—and therefore of the lobbying— process. Even in France, where there is a strong conception of the State and of governmental power, groups place enormous importance on lobbying the

Sécrétariat Général du Comité Interministeriel (responsible for co-ordination of France's EC policy) on the grounds that the relevant minister may have 'misunderstood' the group's position and that his or her civil servants need to be more fully briefed!

From the outset, in the early years of the Community, the High Authority began to exhibit those bureaucratic characteristics identified by Downs (Downs 1967), Its administrative reorganisation of between 1954 and 1955 resulted in a more effective, but more traditionally structured bureaucracy. Thus, members of the High Authority involved in the policy-making process became increasingly enmeshed in cross-cutting relationships with organised interests and national administrations. (Mazey 1992, p.12). This early development of policy networks has continued and has intensified within the Commission itself.

In responding to increased interest group mobilisation, the Commission's approach to consultation has been essentially pragmatic and unplanned. Busy officials often lack detailed technical expertise themselves and lack knowledge of the different systems and problems in the twelve countries of the EC. They have to find means of both tapping sources of expertise beyond those available from the governments of the member states and of mobilising support (and heading off opposition) from those interests directly affected by proposed EC legislation and intervention. Current pressures for more accountability and democratic control over EC policy-makers will merely intensify the Commission's desire to mobilise interest group support. The more that the EC opens up channels of democratic accountability—for example by increasing the powers of the EP—the more the Commission will be driven to seek to accommodate interest groups in the policy formulation phase for fear that disaffected groups will seek to mobilize (more public) support elsewhere, once proposals have been publicly announced.

In one sense, however, it is wrong to suggest that the development of Commission/group relations is totally unplanned. It is underpinned by a clearly articulated 'procedural ambition'—that wherever possible the interface between officials and interests should be via the relevant Euro-associations for each particular policy area. Where such groups do not exist, the Commission itself has been active in helping to create and sustain them—again a familiar bureaucratic response in most Western democracies. Even with long-established groups, Commission officials are not averse to gentle "ear-stroking" in order to encourage the development of more effective representational organisations. In a number of cases, direct and indirect funding is provided, both to sustain the groups and to facilitate interchange between policy professionals (public and private) and to "massage" the agenda setting process in a rather subtle and skilful way.

Nevertheless, the inherent weaknesses of Euro -groups has meant that officials—faced with the need to get on with the job and solve practical problems—often unwittingly undermine the development of effective Euro-groups by frequently consulting directly with national groups and individual firms. It is often the case that only the latter possess the necessary information for the Commission to formulate policy effectively. It would be surprising if hard-pressed officials, facing tough deadlines, did not reach for the telephone or fax and contact, say, a reliable source in an individual chemical or computer company rather than using the relevant Euro-association. As one official explained to us, he could get dozens of pages of relevant information by fax from his contacts with companieswithin hours. The relevant Euro-association would take several weeks to produce a few pages of rather routine data which it would have to gather and re-process from its member firms. Thus, in attempting to identify and characterise the European-policy style, one needs to remember the apparently mundane but crucial point that the pace of policy-making with the Commission

itself is usually quite frenetic. Meta-policy-making designs are soon abondoned at ten o'clock at night, when a Directive has to be re-drafted by the next morning!

Despite the procedural ambition to work via Euro-associations, there is still no uniform organisational culture, and often a pragmatic approach to the policy process within the Commission. Hence there are no detailed procedural rules. Indeed, Christoph has argued that, as British civil servants have found, the style of policy-making at the EC level is 'loosely knit, headless, porous, inefficient, often unpredictable, and occasionally chaotic' (Christoph 1992, p9). Within this complex administrative and multi-cultured decision-making environment, most officials appear to have developed a modus operandi which may have at least the rudimentary elements of a European policy style. An underlying characteristic of this style is of openness to pressure group activity. As Sammy Finer noted in the case of Britain some thirty-five years ago, the use of the term pressure group may be inappropriate. For most of the time, so-called pressure is in reality exerted against an open door (Finer 1958). With relatively few exceptions, groups find that access to Commission officials is not a problem. A typical example was reported to us by the German Solicitors and Lawyers Association which commented that 'relations with Brussels are certainly good and requests for talks have never been refused' (Private Communication 16 August 1990). Indeed, in so far as access is a problem it is precisely because almost everyone gains access. Some of the more perceptive organisations involved in lobbying Brussels have already begun to realise that a game in which almost everyone can play is extremely difficult to control or predict, let alone win. Thus, the German Chemical Workers Union reported to us that it found the Commission receptive, but was fearful that the increasing numbers of organisations seeking to influence the Commission would mean that the Commission would become incapable of dealing with them all and would lose interest in talking to organisations as 'partners' (Private Communication , 28 August 1990). This extreme openness of

the bureacracy is part of the cause of the sometimes quite radical shifts in policy direction as Directives pass through subsequent drafts, following diverse representations from interests in different Member States. Just as participation is unpredictable, then so are policy outcomes.

In addition to openness, two other important characteristics of the European policy process appear to have emerged—the resort to familiar consultation structures and processes, such as advisory committees and informal consultation with interests over the telephone etc., and a tendency to 'unpack' big issues into technical and therefore more manageable policy problems. These can then be 'processed' within something akin to the policy community model cited earlier. In terms of processes and procedures, our own research suggests that officials from most policy orientated DGs habitually use various advisory bodies (e.g. expert groups, expert committees, industry groups) and regularly convene seminars, workshops, and conferences of the relevant interests in order to both seek views and advice. More importantly, they also use these structures to see if some viable consensus can be reached on what practical solutions should be adopted. We should not be surprised by this 'logic of negotiation'. (Jordan and Richardson 1982) Officials in Brussels know, as do officials at the national level, that interest associations are simultaneoulsy a source of potential help and trouble. It therefore makes good practical sense to bring those interests together, round the table in some ad hoc or permanent structure, in order to define problems, devise possible solutions and mobilise support for whatever policy outcome emerges from those who 'matter'. Not only does this improve the information base for decision-making, it also means that potential difficulties in the Council of Ministers or in the EP may be avoided, as those interests which have been consulted will then be active in advocating to their own governments or MEPs the solution which has been 'agreed'. Thus, the very fact of interest group incorporation is itself one of the primary building blocks of a possible

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European policy style. For the reasons outlined earlier, the successful incorporation of groups is, however, not without difficulties. Below, we examine one sector—the environment—where it appears that the sheer volume and intensity of lobbying has induced bureaucratic responses designed to regularise, structure, and stabilise the policy process

4. Environmental Politics: The Balancing of Competing Interests and the Emergence of "Managed Participation"?

One of the features of the EC policy process is the rather high degree of sectorisation of policy-making. Whilst sectorisation and segmentation are present in all bureaucracies and agencies—most organisations are in fact multi-organisations—(Pressman and Wildalvsky, 1973, p.92), the European Commission is especially segmented. The reasons for this are complex and long standing (see Mazey 1992), but of particular importance is the fact that the division of portfolios is to some extent a reflection of the competition between the individual member states. Thus, the usual bureaucratic divisions between competing policy sectors are overlain with national differences and perspectives. This makes any simple characterisation of 'the Commission' significantly less robust than might be the case with national administrations. It also means that each DG (and to some degree, each division within each DG) is free to develop its own administrative and policy-making style.

Although there is now a very widespread recognition, both at the centre—in the form of the Secretary General's Office—and at DG level that the consultation process is becoming overburdensome, responses to the problem of what we might term 'interest overload' have varied. Some individual officials have simply resorted to the technique of 'closure' ie they either terminate the consultation process at the point they judge it to be dysfunctional to effective problem-

solving, or they are reluctant to start it at all. More commonly, a trend appears to be developing against the paid intermediary—ie the lobbying consultant (the hired gun!) because of the sheer weight of numbers and the poor reputation of a proportion of that industry. (There are notable exceptions to this generalisation—namely those lobbying consultants who have developed a good specialist knowledge of specific policy areas).

DG XI is one of the more advanced Directorates, in terms of coming to grips with the need to rationalise and structure the consultation process. The constituency of groups served by DG XI is now a rather broad range of differing interests. Having possibly been an early example of a bureaucratic/group dependency relationship, DG XI it is now attracting a much wider clientele, particularly the many industrial groups which have taken the environmental issue on board. The Directorate is now faced with two broad sets of groups, each set having a series of strengths and weaknesses in the lobbying process (Mazey and Richardson 1992b). Industrial groups such as CEFIC have considerable technical expertise, have long recognised the importance of the EC as a policy focus, have good contacts with other DGs, and, of course, do represent interests occupying a key position in the European and world economy. They possess the traditional strengths of sectional interest groups, even though they now operate in a much more hostile political environment, due to the high political salience of green issues in European politics.

In contrast, environmental groups are generally less well resourced and do not represent interests whose co-operation is vital to the making of the European economy. Yet these groups do exhibit three characteristics which give them certain obvious advantages in the EC policy process. First, as they share a common objective, they have a capacity to build European level coalitions in the form of Euro-groups, umbrella organisations and cross-national networks.

Secondly, via these coalitions, they are able to articulate a European level view—the kind of response so valued as part of the Commission's own developing ideology. Thirdly, and most importantly, they have an ability to set the political agenda in the environmental sector and to structure the content of issues in ways which place other interests at a disadvantage. The environmentalists are not, unlike industrial Euro-associations, competing with each other so intensively for market share. Whilst firms can and do co-operate at the Euro-level, there are often limits to this strategy as they are competing with each other in the marketplace. Within the nation state, environmental groups may 'compete' in the sense of pressing for the location of environmentally damaging developments to be located 'elsewhere', on the Not in My Back Yard (NIMBY) principle. At the European and world level, however, there appears to be no evidence of this kind of tactic—indeed, there is an increasing emphasis, by environmentalists, on the cross-national nature of many environmental problems. In Haas's terms, there is much greater 'ideological cohesion' amongst environmental groups, even though they may compete for members, funds, policy space, and media attention. (Haas 1958)

However, their relative success in influencing the pace and direction of European environmental policy has, predictably, drawn their natural adversaries—the industrialists—more closely into the constellation of groups surrounding DG XI. This presents a considerable challenge to the environmental groups. As industrial groups acquire a more pro-environmental image (for example CEFIC has three intra-federation environmental programmes. (See Andersen 1992, p.170), and as they incorporate environmental issues into company planning policies, the environmentalists will be faced with a more effective opposition. Moreover, the environmental groups themselves seem to be gradually changing their lobbying tactics —from an oppositional stance to a more co-operative and low-key approach. As the President of CEFIC commented in 1990

'I think the demand .... by the environmental organisations is less
extreme ... We have all gained from the experience. On the whole,
therefore, it looks as if the time is ripe for much constructive dialogue ..
between our industry and the ... realistic and responsible environmental
groups.' (quoted by Andersen 1992, p170).

The recognition of the need for compromise by both 'sides' in the environmental
sector, combined with the need for officials for a means of 'managing' the process
of consultation, has prompted DG XI to propose the formation of an advisory
Environmental Forum, specifically designed to bring the competing interests
together. The Forum (proposed under the Fifth Environmental Action
Programme) is designed to precipitate a dialogue with the social partners (by
which is meant the main 'interested parties' in the environmental sector, now
including regional and local government) and will play an influential role in
Community policy-making. This is a reflection of a desire within DG XI to shift
the pattern somewhat from regulatory instruments towards the promotion of
what it calls collective responsibility. If this ambition is realised, the competing
interests will have been incorporated rather directly into the policy process. This
will bring them the potential to influence policy outcomes, but it will also bring
additional costs in terms of resources and loss of 'purity' (Olsen, 1983, pp.157-
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Even if the forum succeeds (its detailed form is still under discussion), we can
still expect environmental issues to be 'unpacked' into specific problems which
can be more easily managed in a process of 'technical' consultation and
negotiation between officials and the affected interests. For example, the detailed
proposals for the reduction of chlorofluorocarbons in part emerged from
discussions within the so-called 'industrial groups'. These included

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representatives of the industries (such as dry-cleaning, foam plastics, air conditioning and refrigeration, textiles etc), but apparently not the environmental groups which had originally campaigned on this issues. Once the general CFC issue had been raised and it had been decided to take action at the European level, the matter became an ssentially technical one—how best could improvement be achieved, consistent with the economic needs of Europe? Again, the environmental case is perhaps indicative of the way forward in other sectors, and looks very familiar to observers of national policy systems.

5.   Conclusion: Chaotic "High Politics", Structured "Low Politics", and the Emergence of a European "Policy style"?

Stanley Hoffmann's distinction between 'high' and 'low' politics is (again) rather useful in helping our understanding of the policy process (Hoffmann, 1966). It may seem naive at this time of crises in the EC even to suggest that the EC policy process may have developed some stable and predictable characteristics! Yet the apparent chaos (e.g. over the ERM, Maastricht, GATT negotiations and even fish!) belies a gradual emergence of what in Britain we termed "standard operating procedures" for the processing of at least the low politics issues in political systems (Richardson and Jordan 1979) These standard operating procedures have long traditions in western and northern European states.Writing nearly twenty years ago, Martin Heisler and Robert Kvavik summarised the nature of the 'European Polity' model, as they termed it, as follows:

'A decision structure characterised by continuous, regularised access for economically, politically, ethnically and/or subculturally based groups to the highest levels of the political system i.e. decision -making sub-system.' (Heisler and Kvavik, 1974 p.48)

They saw the European approach to the question of access for interest groups as regularised and as taking a structured form—a pattern of co-optation noticed as early as the middle 1800s in Norway, for example. At the EC level, Guy Peters has argued recently that there has been a shift toward "bureaucratic politics and policy-making", although he sees a still "...fluid oscillation between large-scale politics and small scale addition of regulation..." (Peters 1992, p. 155). Thus bureaucratic politics may be occurring at two levels—"the first is that of the principal institutions—the Council of Ministers, the European Commission and the European Parliament—taken as a whole." (Peters 1992, p. 116). The second level—of particular interest in terms of the thrust of this paper—is the politics of functional areas. Peters describes the complexities of the politics of those functional areas, as follows:

> "In organisational terms each of these policy areas is populated with its allotment of organizations—Directorates and their commissioners, European Parliament Committees—and with representatives of the affected interests. ...Given the decentralized structure of policy-making in Europe, with multiple actors at the European level and even more at the national level, it should not be surprising if policies were the product of loosely organised and flexible policy communities". (Peters 1992, p. 117).

Philippe Schmitter also suggests a rather messy and loosely coupled system of decision-making, although he suggests that the Maastricht Accord will "... encourage the formation of multiple, semi-autonomous centres of decision-making with shifting sets of members and different areas of functional competence..." (Schmitter 1992).

Whilst it is true that the EC is still a very long way from a stable policy process— in terms of institutional arrangements, formal rules and informal rules of the

game—it may be too pessimistic to conclude that broad characteristation of the policy process as impossible. Elsewhere we have argued that the Europeanisation of interests within (and beyond) the twelve member states can be a potential force in the process of European integration. The suggestion by the neo-functional theorists that groups would play a key role in the integration process may not have yet been proved correct. However, there is increasing evidence that organised interests (again, the multinational companies are probably the best example) are increasingly active in pressing for standardisations, harmonisation and for a "level playing field" in Europe. By level playing field they mean a common European set of rules and procedures, to be applied evenly in the twelve Member States. They also recognise that, in terms of world competition, there is little alternative to cross-national collaboration if European industries are to be able to compete with those of the Pacific rim in the next century. Their desire to reduce uncertainty might also lead them to press for greater political as well as economic union within Europe. Essentially, the sooner the big questions of political union can be settled, the sooner a large uncertainty in the business environment will be removed. Groups like the European Round Table (ERT) not only played a significant role in the origins and development of the SEA, it has also argued more recently that "the unification of Europe is the only practical way to realise its potential and to harness its resources... Deepening and widening are both needed, with the Community strengthening its policies and institutions as well as opening up to the needs of its neighbours" (ERT 1991, p. 13). Groups not directly involved in economic affairs have been equally vociferous in pressing for European integration. For example, the World Wildlife Fund for Nature has argued that "too often, responsibility for nature conservation and environmental protection is spread among local and regional governments answering to different national ministries with no proper co-ordination, inadequate budgets and a lack of commitment to what are seen as second-order priorities" (WWF 1991 p. 6). More specifically,

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WWF has played an important role (along with a network of other European environmental interests) in pressing for greater co-ordination between the many DGs involved in aspects of EC environmental policy. Pressure from these groups has been an important political context to the Report of the Court of Auditors, cited above. (Mazey and Richardson 1993b)

It would be wrong, of course, to see this type of pressure as necessarily leading to more European integration. However in discussing the concept of "community sentiment", Ernst Haas suggests that two of the six conditions for this sentiment to flourish are that,

> "Interest groups and political parties at the national level
> endorse supranational action and in preference to action by
> their national government . . . [and] Interest groups and
> political parties organize beyond the national level in order to
> function more effectively as decision-makers vis à vis the
> separate national governments or the central authority and if
> they define their interests in terms of longer than those of the
> separate nation state from which they originate" (Haas, 1958, pp.
> 9-10)

His formal definition of political integration is as follows: "Political integration is the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states." (Haas 1958, p. 16) Our own research evidence, plus the evidence of others (see Mazey and Richardson 1993a), suggests that we are witnessing that process at work and that interest groups are often active in pressing for wider EC jurisdiction over the pre-existing nation states. Indeed, even many industrial groups are opposed to a liberal interpretation of subsidiarity, as they have no wish to see a return to a multitude of national

regulations governing their activities (a bumpy playing field!). The administrative and transaction costs of operating under twelve diverse sets of VAT or pollution control regulations, for example, is far too high for companies, especially when they themselves are fully "Europeanised" and no longer produce national products or think in terms of national markets. In essence, may of the groups in Europe - both at the national and supra-national level - are actively pressing for a more federal Europe and for the EC to be more state-like in its actions. As organisations, interest groups have, therefore, developed very considerably in their integrative role from the rather limited role described by Lindberg in 1963. At that time, he saw "most EEC-level interest groups as merely liaison groups with essentially secretarial functions and no role to play in co-ordinating national group views." (Lindberg 1963, pp. 287-8) He suggested that interest groups, " ... would be of limited significance for political integration, unless participation in them comes to represent a fundamental restructuring of expectations and tactics. To what extent have collective needs at the regional level taken priority over national differences? Do the necessities of 'international lobbying' force compromise of initial positions? Do interest officials become more "Europe-minded'?" (Lindberg 1963, p. 99) His answer to these and other questions was very guarded, reflecting the relatively early stages of the development of Euro-lobbying in the early 1960s. His caution was in part based on the fact that, at that time, "the vital interests of relatively few are as yet directly affected by decisions of the Community institutions." (Lindberg 1963, p. 99) Crucially, however, he argued that,

> "one can expect that over time the necessity for lobbying will force groups to emphasise collective needs rather than national differences. Such a development can be expected as the central institutions of the EEC become more active, as the types of actions taken involve the harmonization of legislation and the formulations of common policies (rather than the negative process of .... barriers to trade), and as .... groups

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become aware that their interests can no longer be adequately
served at the national level alone." (Lindberg 1963, p. 101)

Most of the available evidence suggests that groups in many if not most policy sectors have certainly recognised that supranational decisions are now inevitable for many policy problems and that it is often in their interests to engage in anticipatory activity in order to influence the shape and direction of European level policy solutions. Thus, increasingly, groups themselves have recognised the logic and momentum of greater Europeanisation of solutions. They are, therefore, beginning to play a very significant role in the process of European integration, as predicted by the neo-functionalists.

Gerhard Lehmruch has suggested that more complex conceptualisations of the structure and process of interest intermediation beyond corporatism are attracting increasing attention. He argues that the metaphor of policy networks and typologies of economic governance may contribute to a better understanding of the role of the state or of administrative strategies in the emergence and dynamics of national and sectoral configurations in interest intermediation (Lehmbruch 1991, p. 122). He notes that empirical regularities in the interactions of organisations and public bureaucracies are sometimes, " . . . discussed as contributing to a specific administrative culture' (Jann 1983) or 'policy style' (Richardson 1982), but that all too often these concepts . . . . look like residual categories, the theoretical relevance of which for the comparative analysis of political structures is not quite clear." (Lehmruch 1991, p.126) His proposal is that we should begin to analyse what he calls the "configurative" aspect of interest intermediation: "It is a structure made up of complex linkages between organizations, agencies, and other institutions the dynamic of which is not always sufficiently understood by isolating specific elements or relationships." These linkages should be seen as hanging together in complex "configurations".

Furthermore, he argues, to delineate a 'policy network' approach in combination with an emphasis on institutionalisation might be a further step in trying to understand these configurative dynamics. Understanding the variability of policy networks is suggested as particularly important for the analysis of attempts to remodel patterns of state intervention, as cross-national research has shown that specific configurations of networks have either supported or constrained attempts at reform in such areas as telecommunications and health policy.

Our evidence that at the EC level there are indeed quite significant variations in the nature of policy networks (and that in some specific policy areas no networks may exist) but that there is at least a case to be made that the network concept is quite useful. More and more policy areas are now showing a high degree of 'group density' in the sense that many if not most of the interests have become organised and are active at the European level. They are also pressing their national administrations as part of this Europeanisation of the policy process. As a result, it may be possible to argue that at least the cross-national differences in interest intermediation will be lessened as all national policy actors realise that one essential element of a European lobbying strategy is, as we suggested earlier, close co-ordination between national groups and national administrations. The French case is especially interesting for, as Suleiman has shown, the French bureaucratic elite has a tradition of autonomy from lobbies and a supposed tradition of resisting pressure (quoted by Lehmbruch, 1991, p. 123).

Whether or not this is the case, there is absolutely no doubt that European level policy-makers will face increased organisation of interests and therefore increased pressure to somehow develop a more regularised and effective system of interest intermediation. Thus the European Parliament, in January 1992, held a public hearing on the need to have some system of registering lobbyists at the

Parliament, essentially because the Parliament is now besieged by special interests from across Europe and beyond. Following these investigations, the EP is to set up a register of lobbies. Equally, Commission officials have found that increased interest mobilisation demands some form of "management". Consequently, we see the Commission itself playing a role in the evolution of the system. For example The Secretary General's Office has recently formulated some guidelines for managing the consultation process. Consideration is being given to the preparation of a code of conduct designed to govern relations with those organisations set up with the specific purpose of liaising with the Commission. Indeed, it appears that these are the beginnings of the so-called "consultation lists" familiar in Britain or the Scandinavian "remiss" system. Thus, Secretary General has reported that "Commission services have drawn up directories which list community trade, agricultural, industrial and other professional associations as a first tool in the search for increased understanding of special interest groups" (Commission 1992) As Lehmbruch notes, " . . . in critical junctures state bureaucracies have often played and important formative part of their own" (Lehmbruch 1991, p. 135). Thus, " . . . interactions of governmental bureaucracies with associations or other corporate economic actors seem to be of crucial importance in linking the macro- and meso-levels and result in the emergence of network configurations which will eventually become institutionalised." (Lehmbruch 1991, p. 136)

We do not yet know quite what form this institutionalisation will take, but it is a reasonable prediction that some form of institutionalisation *will* take place in order to render the system of European level intermediation manageable. Wolfgang Streeck and Philippe Schmitter, however, see limits to the degree of institutionalisation of concertation because of the absence of anything resembling a balance of class or sectoral interests, as neocorporatism assumes an underlying social structure that could be plausibly conceived of as polarised in two large

classes - 'capital' and 'labour' (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991, p. 146). As they argue, attempts to create Euro-corporatism failed and a centralised pattern of interest politics did not emerge at the European level, despite their belief that it was so common at the national level (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991, p. 139). We would agree with their analysis that there is no Euro-corporatism as such, but we doubt whether they are correct in arguing that, "the main concession governments seem to have made in return for business giving up previous claims for national protection was that the future European political economy was to be significantly less subject to institutional regulation - national or supranational" (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991, p. 149). In the lead-up to the Single European Act of 1992, they note that, "the project of European integration became finally and formally bound up with a deregulation project" (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991, p. 149). In practice, much of what can be termed European integration is in fact about regulation, in part because regulation is a major resource to institutions when their financial budgets are severely constrained, as that of the EC is (so long as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is in place). A small Commission with relatively few financial resources to hand out is, almost inevitably, going to turn increasingly to regulation as a cost effective means of securing Europe-wide change in a number of policy areas. It seems unlikely, from the evidence so far, that Streeck & Schmitter are correct to suggest that supranational sovereignty will be used exclusively for the *external reassertion* of, as opposed to *internal intervention* in, the European economy. As Majone notes in his exploration of the growth of EC regulation, "One essential characteristic is the limited influence of budgetary limitations on the activities of regulators. The size of non-regulatory, direct-expenditure programmes is constrained by budgetary appropriations and, ultimately, by the size of government tax revenues. In contrast, the real costs of most regulatory programmes are borne directly by the firms and individuals who have to comply with them." (Majone 1989, p. 166)

Streeck & Schmitter see the future development of the European Community as clearly not neo-corporatist. Thus they see no mechanism in sight that could "Rationalize its political system, help crystallize its *melange* of actors and processes, and establish corporatist monopolies of representation, interassociational hierarchies or for that matter a predominant position for the Commission's bureaucracy and technocracy" (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991, p. 159). Their analysis poses the central question regarding the form of interest intermediation - namely, is the system so complex that it will prove impossible to introduce and institutionalise a stable set of standard operating procedures for managing interest intermediation? Our preliminary view is that there are tendencies in the system which suggest that both the Commission and the European Parliament wish to see a more regularised and effective system of intermediation and that the interests themselves are now coming to the view that effective lobbying requires a European wide approach to policy-makers. Basically, the interests have recognised the reality of a federal Europe. Whatever terms we may use to describe the EC - whether it be federal, neo-federal, would-be-state, neo-state or whatever, the reality for interests in Europe is that much of the regulatory framework under which their own policy areas are governed is now affected by EC intervention. While theorists may debate the precise labels to be used, if one is running an environmental pressure group in France, a chemical company in Germany, or hoping to build a motorway in Spain, the EC will play a very important role in what one is allowed to do. This is why there has been an explosion of lobbying activity within the EC, such that the number and range of groups now seeking influence is likely to cause "overcrowding" of some policy sectors (Gustafsson & Richardson 1980). One response to "overcrowding" would be to return to the neo-corporatist ambitions of the Commission in its early years. However, it seems unlikely that anything like a corporatist system could be made to operate, at least until and unless the Euro-groups become much more effective organisations - both in terms of their technical expertise and their internal

decision-making process. Thus, with a multiplicity of interests and a multiplicity of access points, it is difficult to envisage the Commission setting up a system which could be described in Schmitter's core description of corporatism as " . . . monopoly of representation; hierarchic co-ordination across associations; functional differentiation into non-overlapping categories; official recognition or semi-public status; involuntary or quasi-compulsory membership; and some degree of heteronomy with regard to the selection of leaders and the articulation of demands." (Schmitter 1989, p. 64) Indeed he comments that, "I have become less and less convinced that corporatism - with or without one of its multiple prefixes or adjectives - will survive, much less be as much an imperative for the future of capitalism as Shonfield thought." Of particular relevance to our interest in lobbying systems, he has argued that "the notion of setting up a new neo-corporatist dynasty of the global or meta-level is positively frightening, given the transaction costs involved and the potential decisional perversities." (Schmitter 1989, p. 72)

What, then, might emerge? It seems unlikely that decision-making in the commission will shift significantly from the sectorised and segmented approach which has developed so far, although the environmental case does suggest that even sectorization can be eroded. EC policy is, therefore, likely to continue to emerge from sectoral networks of some kind. The evolution of these networks is still underway and we might expect, therefore, a multiple model of EC policy-making to continue, in which interests play an increasingly important role but in which policy-makers make increased efforts to "manage" the system. Andersen & Eliassen go so far as suggesting, in contrast to Schmitter's view of the possibilities of trans-national neo-corporatism, that corporate structures are likely to be more important in the future, at the expense of the lobbying patterns of the late 1980s and early 1990s, although they appear to see this as dependent upon the emergence of a more parliamentary based system (Andersen & Eliassen 1991,

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p. 186). Despite the Maastricht Treaty, this possibility still seems problematic. The core of the process is likely to remain Commission based, sectorally structured and linked to a complex network of groups or organisations across Europe and beyond. By a process of trial and error, decision-makers will learn which groups are capable of co-optation and which are not. Equally groups will learn the basic rules of co-optation As a result more stable and manageable networks of policy-makers and groups are likely to emerge.

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