

ZOE ONUȚU

**ROMANIAN INTEREST REPRESENTATION IN BRUSSELS:
AN INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF ROMANIA'S LOBBYING
POTENTIAL IN THE VIEW OF EU MEMBERSHIP**



COLECȚIE DE SUCCES

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ABSTRACT

The paradigm shifts induced by the consecutive enlargements on the EU polity reshape the questions regarding the influence of various interests on the sophisticated patterns of EU governance. Strongly motivated by the new focus of interest group research, this study aims to provide a tentative assessment of the potential of a future member state, Romania, to influence the European policy process. Thus a theoretically-based overview of the EU lobbying arena is firstly performed, in order to isolate the relevant criteria by which to assess the lobbying efficiency of interest groups in such a competitive environment. After a brief excursus on the particular Central and Eastern European repertoires for interest representation, the analysis further proceeds to discussing the aforementioned criteria on the core study case material represented by the Romanian organizations activating in Brussels. This study argues that the potential of Romanian interest groups to lobby effectively at the EU level is significantly constrained by confining conditions that relate both to their domestic institutional environment and their organizational characteristics. It is further suggested that, at this stage, the process of institutional learning is at a premium.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The European Union, as a unique quasi-plural polity, is the epitome of a complex lobbying arena in which interest groups play a salient and nevertheless extremely controversial role in shaping decisions with far-reaching impact. Although the 'Big Bang enlargement' is already a *fait accompli*, there remains a paucity of literature addressing the impact of EU membership on interest representation in both the ten new member states and the candidate countries (Romania and Bulgaria). What is more, the question of whether the miscellaneous interest groups from the new member states, and especially from the candidate countries, are ready to exert a salient degree of influence and have a significant presence in the EU lobbying arena has seldom been addressed in a balanced and objective fashion.

Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to explore the potential of Romanian interest groups in Brussels to influence European policy process by conducting a general assessment of Romania's

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advantages and drawbacks from the perspective of interest representation at the European level. Such a research question immediately triggers off a whole set of subordinate questions: What is the specificity of the European system of interest representation? What are the particular criteria and factors that determine the influence of interest groups on the EU decision-making process? To what extent do interest groups from the new member states and accession countries in CEE lobby efficiently in the EU given their specific socio-political background? And within this context, how far do Romanian interest groups meet the criteria that are essential for maintaining influence within the European decision making process?

By considering both primary and secondary sources, this study will offer both original insight and a fruitful contribution in addressing this particular aspect of the Central and Eastern European interest representation in the EU. As the very few studies concerning Romanian interest representation in the EU are primarily descriptive accounts lacking an overarching theoretical perspective, this study will constitute a superior basis for further research analysing the actual

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lobbying efficiency of Romanian interest groups in Brussels.

It must be emphasised that there are serious limitations to research in this area, arising not only due to the sensitivity of measuring lobbying potential but also because of the deficit in empirical data relating to the activity and success of Romanian interest groups at the EU level. As well, a thorough analysis of all the Romanian actors in Brussels is beyond the scope of this study. Its specific purpose is to discover the conditions by which Romanian interest groups can become effective actors in the EU lobbying arena while also taking into consideration the potential drawbacks and/or comparative advantages that these groups might possess and outlining some of the methodological problems that one encounters when investigating this challenging topic. This research objective will be pursued in four steps.

The following chapter will argue that the European system of interest articulation and intermediation has a particular and complex character that reflects the unique nature of the European Union polity itself. This general overview of the Brussels lobbying arena is an

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essential foundation to the associated investigation, as it is instrumental in establishing the relevant criteria by which to assess the lobbying efficiency of interest groups in such a competitive environment. Drawing upon rational-institutionalism and the theory of access, the criteria used to evaluate the lobbying potential of Romanian interest groups can be grouped under two major headings: the domestic institutional environment and the organisational characteristics.

Assuming that, from the perspective of interest politics Romania generally shares the characteristics of its Central and Eastern European (CEE) counterparts, the third chapter performs a brief excursus into CEE lobbying activities in the EU, in order to provide relevant benchmarks for the ensuing evaluation of Romanian organisations' potential to lobby the EU. This chapter will argue that the distinct socio-political background of CEE lobbying organisations determines the particular repertoire for interest representation at the European level.

The fourth chapter concentrates upon discussing the first set of assessment criteria. These criteria refer to the specificities of the

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Romanian domestic institutional environment that might affect the performance of national interest groups at the EU level. After firstly analysing the degree of state administrative autonomy from private sector actors and the level of state control of the economy, it will then investigate the existence of a ‘national lobbying culture’ by looking at the current status of the civil society, lobbying regulation and the general domestic attitude towards lobbying in general, and EU lobbying in particular.

The Romanian presence in Brussels and the degree of access and engagement in the European lobbying arena constitute the subject of the fifth chapter. The core case study material is represented by the Romanian representation offices in Brussels, as well as by the Romanian organizations that are part of European-level associations. To this end, primary sources have been used by drawing information from questionnaires filled in by the aforementioned actors. Moreover, an in-depth interview with Valentin Cotârță, an Expert Adviser working for the European Commission, was conducted to discover how Romanian groups are seen in the eyes of the Commission.

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The conclusion of this study provides a summary of the investigation and concludes whether the characteristics of Romanian interest groups indicate a potential to lobby effectively in the competitive EU arena.

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CHAPTER 2: INTEREST REPRESENTATION IN BRUSSELS: COMPLEXITY FAVOURS THE WELL-PREPARED

This chapter is concerned with the analysis of the special nature and inherent complexity of European interest articulation and intermediation, while also advancing several relevant criteria for measuring the lobbying capacity of miscellaneous actors in this competitive policy-making environment. It will firstly argue that the European level interest representation has a special character that reflects the particular nature of the EU system of governance itself. Taking into consideration the sheer complexity as well as the utmost importance of lobbying the European institutions, the second part will bring forward the lobbying capacity assessment indicators that will be further employed in this study.

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