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# Legislative lobbying in context: towards a conceptual framework of interest group lobbying in the European Union

Heike Klüver, Caelesta Braun and Jan Beyers

**ABSTRACT** We outline a conceptual framework that identifies and characterizes the contextual nature of interest group politics in the European Union (EU) to better understand variation in interest group mobilization, lobbying strategies and interest group influence. We focus on two sets of contextual factors that affect EU interest group lobbying. First, we argue that interest group activities are shaped by several policy-related factors, namely the complexity, the policy type, the *status quo*, the salience and the degree of conflict characterizing legislative proposals and the associated issues. Second, we posit that lobbying in the EU is affected by institutional factors that vary within the EU political system, such as the institutional fragmentation within the European Commission and the European Parliament and across different national political systems depending on the patterns of interest intermediation or the vertical and horizontal distribution of powers. Finally, we theorize about the inter-relationship between contextual features and interest group properties and summarize the findings of the collection.

**KEY WORDS** Context; European Union; interest groups; lobbying.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The role and position of interest groups in the European Union (EU) is a contentious issue. While the Commission actively reaches out to European civil society, the actual impact and involvement of interest groups is widely debated. Journalistic accounts report the alleged influence of thousands of lobbyists<sup>1</sup> or report unethical behaviour by members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who literally adopt interest group proposals.<sup>2</sup> Recent scholarly analyses report the structural underrepresentation of public interests versus business interests in EU consultation processes and argue that the Commission's participatory democratic ideal is an unattainable myth (see, for instance, Kohler-Koch and Quittkat [2013]). Moreover, most theoretical approaches about European integration and European policy-making – ranging from neo-functionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, to multi-level governance – emphasize in one way or another the relevance of interest groups. Furthermore, it is hard to

imagine how the EU would operate without the informal involvement of non-state stakeholders. When the European Commission (EC) launches a new legislative initiative, this propels political activity of affected stakeholders as they mobilize to shape the outcome of the policy debate in their favour. In addition, the European institutions seek the expertise and support from organized interests, and several EU-level interest groups have been established with the active support of the EC and the European Parliament (EP) (e.g., Bouwen 2004; Broscheid and Coen 2003; Klüver 2013a, 2013b; Mahoney and Beckstrand 2011). Yet, although the actual importance of group politics can hardly be underestimated, the jury is still out as to whether interest group involvement in the EU is systematically biased, or, more specifically, why and how interest group involvement at different EU institutions varies and how to explain this variation.

One of the reasons for this lack of systematic knowledge is that interest group mobilization in the European multi-level and multi-institutional context is a complex affair that remains poorly understood. To begin with, this context is never constant. Policy issues differ extensively in the level of attention they raise among the public, the scope of European competencies, their (technical) complexity and the conflict they cause among stakeholders. In addition to the varying complexity of policy issues, interest groups face a highly fragmented institutional environment. They can seek access to the policy-making process through a wide variety of institutional venues at the European, the national level and even the subnational level. The EU therefore constitutes a promising opportunity structure offering a multitude of access points to interest groups (Richardson 2000). Interest groups can, for instance, by-pass non-responsive governments by directly lobbying the European institutions in Brussels to achieve their policy goals (Marks and McAdam 1996). Hence, interest groups are embedded in a highly complex and multi-layered institutional environment that sometimes constrains, yet in other instances enables, them to successfully pursue their interests.

This collection's objective is to analyse how the contextual complexity of EU governance affects the involvement of societal stakeholders, more precisely their mobilization, lobbying strategies and influence.<sup>3</sup> Our main argument is that the contextual nature of specific policy debates is highly important for interest group lobbying, and that individual interest group features such as interest group type (e.g., non-governmental organization vs business group), interest group resources or geographical level of organization (e.g., national vs European groups) do not alone account for understanding lobbying processes. Nonetheless, this does not mean that group characteristics are irrelevant. Interest group characteristics play an important role for interest group mobilization, strategies and influence. It has been shown, for example, that diffuse interest groups typically lobby, plus gain access to, members of the European Parliament (MEPs) while economic interest groups tend to interact more with the Council or the EC (Dür and Mateo 2012). And not all interest groups are similarly able to 'venue-shop' at the European level owing to capacity constraints and the high

demands – in terms of resources – posed by the complexity of European policy-making (Beyers and Kerremans 2012; Dür and Matteo 2013; Eising 2007; Quittkat 2011). However, while previous research has paid considerable attention to these individual interest group characteristics, the effect of contextual variables has largely been neglected in previous research. Therefore, this collection aims to tease out how the institutional and policy context in which lobbying takes place explains interest group mobilization, strategies and influence while controlling for other alternative explanatory variables previously identified in the literature.

A large number of interest group studies in the EU traditionally focused on the individual characteristics of interest groups such as their financial resources, their organizational characteristics, their ideological views or their expertise to explain lobbying processes (e.g., Bouwen 2004; Dür and de Bièvre 2007a; Eising 2007). As a result, contextual factors were not always explicitly modelled and controlled for. This might be one of the reasons why interest group scholars have not yet fully analysed the complex interplay between individual interest group behaviour and the overall institutional or policy context in which interest groups operate (see e.g., Bunea and Baumgartner 2014; Dür and de Bièvre 2007b). In our view, lobbying needs to be understood as how individual group behaviours are affected by contextual factors. However, interest group scholars have only recently started to consider how institutional and policy-specific contextual factors affect interest group lobbying in the EU (for example, Bunea [2013]; Klüver [2013a, 2013b]; Mahoney [2007, 2008]; the contributions in this collection).

The lack of previous interest group research taking into account policy-specific and institutional context characteristics is largely owing to research designs that primarily focused on one or just a few policy debates and therefore treated contextual characteristics as a constant. This collection brings together contributions that are part of the larger INTEREURO-project, as well as two contributions from affiliated projects, which analyse and compare mobilization, lobbying strategies and influence for a large number of policy debates.<sup>4</sup> In order to better understand how the contextual complexity of EU governance affects the mobilization, lobbying strategies and influence of interest groups in the EU, INTEREURO is based on two sampling techniques.<sup>5</sup> First, a set of 125 legislative proposals submitted by the EC between 2008 and 2010 was sampled, for which the project draws on a sophisticated and innovative policy-centred sample of interest group mobilization, which allows for considerable variation with regard to policy-related and institutional characteristics so that we are able to systematically analyse how policy-specific and institutional context factors shape mobilization, strategies and influence of interest groups in the EU (Beyers *et al.* 2014; De Bruycker and Beyers *forthcoming*). Second, this sample was complemented by an organization-centred sampling technique that draws on registries to compile a general overview of all stakeholders in the EU to better understand mobilization biases on specific issues (Baroni *et al.* 2014; Berkhout *et al.* 2015).

## 2. THE POLICY AND POLITY DETERMINANTS OF INTEREST GROUP POLITICS IN THE EU

In this collection, we focus on two sets of contextual factors that affect EU interest group mobilization, strategies and influence. This framework presents a general typology of policy-related and institutional contextual factors that affect interest group mobilization, lobbying strategies and interest group influence in the EU more generally, and, secondly, guides the contributions in this collection. To begin with, interest group activities are shaped by policy-related factors such as the complexity, salience and degree of conflict characterizing legislative proposals initiated by the EC. Furthermore, lobbying in the EU is affected by institutional features where the specific multi-layered structure of the EU requires special attention and leads us to distinguish between two types of factors. First, we have institutional factors that vary *within* the EU political system, such as between the different institutions involved, the Directorates General (DGs) in charge of specific legislative initiatives or the role of party groups in the EP. Second, we can specifically look at variation *across* different national political systems depending on the patterns of interest intermediation or the vertical and horizontal distribution of powers and how this affects interest group mobilization, their lobbying strategies and their influence. Finally, we theorize about the interrelationship between contextual features and interest group properties.

### 2.1. Policy-related factors

A large part of the lobbying activities undertaken by European interest groups seeks to influence and shape EU policy-making. However, legislative proposals and issues are by no means uniform, but differ in a variety of characteristics, and these characteristics have important consequences for lobbying strategies and lobbying success (Baumgartner *et al.* 2009; Klüver 2013a, 2013b; Mahoney 2007, 2008). In particular, we consider the following contextual factors as relevant for interest group politics in the EU: complexity; policy type; the *status quo*; salience; degree of conflict; and the size and composition of lobbying coalitions. One can conceive these policy-related factors at multiple levels of a legislative debate. For instance, at the level of a policy area or a particular field, such as the environment, one might distinguish environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) *vis-à-vis* producer interests. Yet, although such broad cleavages do exist, many policies are characterized by much more fine-grained lines of conflict that cut across these conventionally assumed cleavages (Klüver 2013a). In the INTEREURO-project we assessed policy context factors largely at the level of legislative proposals as submitted by the EC. However, we acknowledge that many pieces of legislation embody multiple issues and are potentially multi-dimensional. Some proposals may be characterized by multiple salient issues, while other proposals may only contain one minor issue of discussion. Interviews with experts in the EP, the EC and with

interest group officials led to the identification of an average of four substantive issues per legislative proposal. An issue represents a potential controversy centred around a particular aspect of a legislative proposal and for which stakeholders and policy-makers may disagree about a desirable political outcome.

An important factor affecting EU interest group politics is the *complexity* of the legislative proposals and the related policy issues (Klüver 2011, 2013a; Woll 2007). Policy-making is a highly challenging task owing to the increasingly technical nature of modern society and technologies. Legislation differs extensively in terms of complexity, which denotes the 'degree to which a given policy problem is difficult to analyze, understand or solve' (Klüver 2011: 487). Some legislative proposals are relatively simple and confined to a particular policy field, whereas others are highly complex, as they deal with extremely technical matters and have repercussions for multiple fields. In such instances, the European institutions are frequently looking for external expertise because of their relatively small number of staff relative to the large amount of policy competences of the EU. Interest groups, which are typically experts in their specific fields, are therefore welcome interlocutors. Yet, the demand for input from interest groups varies with the degree of complexity, and it can therefore be expected that interest group access and influence should importantly vary with the complexity of policy proposals (e.g., Klüver 2013a).

The *policy type* is another important contextual variable that needs to be acknowledged. Lowi (1964) distinguished regulatory, distributive and redistributive policies. While distributive policies relate to measures that distribute resources from the government to a societal group, redistributive policies transfer resources from one group to another. Regulatory policies are, by contrast, designed to shape behavioural practices. The main thrust of the INTER-EURO-project is that the substantive nature of specific policies affect politics. In particular, we expect that the characteristics of different policy types have considerable consequences for the mobilization, the lobbying strategies and the influence of interest groups in the EU.

Moreover, it is important to consider the *status quo*. Usually policy-makers do not start from scratch, but legislative initiatives often build on existing legislation that is the result of earlier rounds of policy-making. For instance, Baumgartner *et al.* (2009) have shown that lobbying in the United States often boils down to two sides opposing each other, one trying to protect the *status quo* while the other is fighting for policy change. Similarly, we expect that the *status quo* has important implications for interest group lobbying in the EU. Depending on whether interest groups aim to protect or change the *status quo*, this could have implications for their mobilization, their lobbying strategies and their policy influence.

The overall *salience* of concrete pieces of legislation should have furthermore important implications for interest groups (Klüver 2013a; Mahoney 2007, 2008). The panoply of existing definitions means that salience is a notoriously difficult concept (Leuffen *et al.* 2014; Warntjen 2012). One way to understand salience is actor-centred, and considers how much individual actors are willing

to invest in a particular issue. Yet, most contributions in this collection adopt a policy-centred account of salience and concentrate on the relative political attention some specific policy issue gains compared to other policy issues. Our basic presumption, thereby, is that the attention policy issues gain among stakeholders as well as the overall public attention is an important contextual factor that strongly affects lobbying patterns. For instance, if legislative proposals hardly raise attention by other interest groups or by the general public, interest groups should find it fairly easy to move legislative proposals closer to their preferences. However, if many interest groups mobilize, interest groups may face considerable counter lobbying. One example is the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) directive, which mobilized a large set of stakeholders (Persson 2007; Wonka 2008b). Similarly, legislative proposals that raise considerable public attention could have electoral consequences for politicians and may affect the ability of interest groups to feed their ideas into the decision-making process.

A related factor is the *degree of conflict* that characterizes a policy debate (Klüver 2013a; Mahoney 2007, 2008). Some policy proposals are largely consensual and do not cause any major opposition. However, other policies are highly conflictual and divide interest groups into different sets of competing advocacy coalitions. If policies do not generate conflict, interest groups should face less competition and find it easier to influence European policymakers. However, if policy proposals lead to major opposition so that countervailing forces are fighting each other, lobbying success becomes difficult as different competing interest groups are pulling the EU institutions in different directions. Moreover, in such cases policy outcomes run the risk of ending up in watered-down compromises and the absence of clear winners and losers. It is important to note the difference between salience and conflict: policy proposals might trigger the interest of a large number of interest groups, which makes them salient, but interest groups might largely agree on preferred policy outcomes so that there is little conflict. At the same time, legislative proposals might only lead to the mobilization of a small circle of interest groups, but these might be fundamentally divided about the issue. Salience only refers to the number of interest groups that pay attention to policy issues and seek to influence the European institutions, whereas conflict refers to the preference configuration of interest groups.

Finally, we expect that the size and resources of policy-specific *lobbying coalitions* have important consequences for EU interest group politics (Baumgartner *et al.* 2009; Bunea 2013; Klüver 2013a, 2013b). Lobbying is usually not an individual endeavour, but a collective enterprise in which a multitude of interest groups simultaneously try to influence the legislative process. To better understand why interest groups sometimes lose and sometimes win, it is important to take into account the preference configuration of interest groups and how groups join forces and establish a lobbying coalition which addresses the European institutions *en bloc*. One important hypothesis is that the size of coalitions matters, namely interest groups that belong to the larger lobbying

coalition should find it much easier to shape policy-making in their favour (Klüver 2013a, 2013b). This implies that, although individual interest groups will be our main units of observation, analytically we will often need to look at collective sets of interest groups that act in a somewhat concerted way.

## 2.2. Institutional factors

With regard to institutional factors, it is important to take into account the structure of institutional venues in which interest group lobbying takes place. With regard to the EU institutional system, it is crucial to theorize about the institutional differences between the EC, the EP and the Council, their internal configuration and the inter-institutional arrangements between them. As lobbying the Council importantly involves lobbying national governments at the member state level, it is furthermore crucial to take into account the institutional differences between different countries.

Concerning the *EC* we should account for the characteristics of the political level, including the College of Commissioners and their personal cabinets and the features of the administrative level consisting of functionally organized Directorates-General (DGs). Previous research has shown that almost all Commissioners pursued a high-level political career in their home states before coming to Brussels (Döring 2007; Wonka 2007). Commissioners typically have strong ties to their home countries which influence the positions that they take with regard to legislative proposals (Thomson 2008; Wonka 2008). Moreover, the appointment of the College of Commissioners is increasingly a political process in which party politics plays an important role (Döring 2007; Wonka 2007). It therefore might make a difference for lobbying which Commissioner is in charge of a legislative proposal.

In addition, there is not only important variation with regard to the political level of the EC, but also with regard to the administrative level. Legislative proposals of the EC are typically drafted by the Directorates General, which significantly differ in their policy views as a result of their sectoral competence and administrative culture (Cram 1997; Hartlapp *et al.* 2013; Nugent 2001). What is more, Hartlapp *et al.* (2013) have shown that the primarily responsible DG exercises important influence on the content of the policy proposal. In terms of interest group lobbying, it therefore makes a difference for mobilization, strategy choice and lobbying success which DG is responsible for drafting a legislative proposal (see Coen and Katsaitis [2013] and the contributions by Bernhagen *et al.* [2015], Boräng and Naurin [2015] and Klüver *et al.* [2015]).

With regard to understanding lobbying in the *EP*, we argue that it is important to acknowledge its internal configuration. MEPs are grouped into party groups which co-ordinate the legislative activities of their members (Hix 2002; Kreppel 2002). Party groups exercise important influence on how MEPs cast their vote on policy proposals, as they have important stick-and-carrot instruments at their disposal such as allocating committee seats, rapporteurships and speaking time on the floor (Hix 2002). Given the strong role of



party groups and the ideological differences between them, interest groups will therefore carefully select the party groups they target in order to reach their policy goals (see also Marshall [2014]).

The EP is furthermore importantly structured by its committee system. Like many parliaments at the national level, the bulk of the parliamentary work is conducted in functionally organized committees. Previous research has shown that there are considerable differences with regard to the composition and the preferences of the various parliamentary committees (McElroy 2006; Yordanova 2009). Since committee chairs exercise important influence on the legislative agenda and organize the committee work (Mamadouh and Raunio 2003), they are particularly attractive interlocutors for lobbyists (Marshall 2014). In order to understand variation in interest group lobbying in the EU, it is therefore important to take into account which committee is in charge of a proposal and which MEP chairs that committee.

Finally, additional lobbying targets within the EP are the so-called ‘rapporteur’ and the ‘shadow rapporteur’ (Yordanova 2011; Yoshinaka *et al.* 2010). For each Commission proposal, a rapporteur is selected from among the MEPs who is responsible for drafting a detailed report on the legislative proposal. The rapporteur has important agenda-setting powers and information advantages *vis-à-vis* other MEPs. The rapporteur becomes an expert in the subject area and his/her report lays the basis for the committee deliberations. In order to monitor the work of the rapporteur, opposing party groups furthermore appoint ‘shadow rapporteurs’ who report about the progress of the legislative process and give voting instructions. Interest group scholars therefore need to take the pivotal role of rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs into account when analysing lobbying in the EP (Marshall 2010).

With regard to the *Council*, we posit that it is vital to consider the role of preparatory bodies, inter-institutional arrangements and the institutional configurations at the member state level. Since a vast number of decisions are already taken by the preparatory bodies, the working groups and the Committee of Permanent Representations, which prepare ministerial meetings in the Council, these supportive bodies are important lobbying targets (Saurugger 2009). Moreover, we need to take into account inter-institutional arrangements between the EU institutions, as many legislative decisions are now based on informal interactions between the Council and the EP, which has important implications for interest group access to EU policy-making processes (Farrell and Héritier 2004).

Moreover, as interest groups lobby the Council by approaching national governments at home, explanatory models need to consider how institutional factors vary *across* national political systems (see the contributions by Rasmussen and Binderkrantz [2015] and Eising *et al.* [2015] in this collection). Even though we have witnessed an increasing number of European umbrella associations to which national groups have delegated the representation of their interests at Brussels, these EU-level interest groups are very heterogeneous and need to seek an EU-wide policy position that integrates different national sensitivities, often resulting in interest representation at the lowest common

denominator. As a result, national interest groups frequently lobby the European institutions directly. In line with the so-called ‘compensation hypothesis’, it is often argued that additional lobbying venues provided by the EU are especially attractive to interest groups that gain little influence at the domestic level (Beyers and Kerremans 2012; Eising 2007; Kriesi *et al.* 2007). We posit that interest group lobbying varies with regard to two different characteristics: the distribution of powers and the patterns of interest intermediation. Interest groups embedded in political systems that are vertically and horizontally decentralized and which are characterized by corporatist modes of interest intermediation have considerable opportunities to already shape policy-making at home, and therefore have little incentives to lobby the European institutions. By contrast, domestic interest groups from statist and highly centralized systems are largely excluded from national political decisions and therefore have important incentives to mobilize in Brussels.

### 3. LESSONS LEARNT

Overall, the contextual approach to EU legislative lobbying presented in this collection demonstrates the inherently multi-faceted nature of interest representation and that the policy and institutional context significantly affects the role interest groups play in the EU. Studying EU interest groups is not a matter of one-size-fits-all theories, but rather involves the careful development of mid-range theories that are attentive to the contextual nature of each of the different stages of the influence production process (Lowery *et al.* 2008). This collection presents seven substantive contributions, all of which offer novel theory-guided empirical work and analyse the effect of these contextual factors on three aspects of EU interest group politics: interest group density (Berkhout *et al.* 2015); (framing) strategies employed by interest groups (Beyers *et al.* 2015; Boräng and Naurin 2015; Eising *et al.* 2015; Klüver *et al.* 2015); and lobbying success (Bernhagen *et al.*, 2015; Binderkrantz and Rasmussen, 2015). It is clear from all contributions that a contextualized approach of interest group politics leads to a more precise and valid understanding of lobbying in the EU. We believe that the unique contribution of the overall project lies in the combination of a policy-centred approach with a quantitative research design and the triangulation of a large and diverse set of data sources. Sound scholarship on group politics needs to take into account the varying policies societal interests seek to influence and the institutional context in which concrete policy processes unfold. And most importantly, this collection demonstrated that it is possible to develop robust research designs, build cumulative datasets and, at the same time, account for the heavily contextualized nature of lobbying.

The first article assesses the impact of contextual factors on interest group density. Berkhout *et al.* (2015) show that so-called supply side factors, such as the number of potential constituents and the level of market integration affect interest group density in the EU. They thereby demonstrate that the structure of economic sectors and the organizational environment of interest groups

are important contextual variables, next to policy-related and institutional factors, to explain interest group mobilization. More specifically, their analyses suggest that the impact of institutional factors on interest group mobilization need to be examined in the context of models that are more fully attentive to the powerful forces of supply-side factors that condition responses to political events.

It is through a policy-centred quantitative research design that Bernhagen *et al.* (2015), Beyers *et al.* (2015) and Binderkrantz and Rasmussen (2015) were able to demonstrate that institutional variation at the EU level as well as institutional factors at the level of the member states play an important role for interest group lobbying. More specifically, the contribution by Bernhagen *et al.* (2015) shows that the intra-institutional context reinforces the impact of lobbyists' informational resources on the ability of interest groups to influence European policy formulation. Similarly, it is by considering the policy position of a large number of organized interests on a considerable set of legislative proposals that Beyers *et al.* (2015) show that much lobbying efforts reflect party competition and that party and interest group politics do not represent two entirely different worlds. Finally, Binderkrantz and Rasmussen (2015) demonstrate that national embeddedness importantly affects perceived lobbying success during the agenda-setting stage. Their findings corroborate our expectation that the level of horizontal and vertical distribution of powers and the resulting access opportunities at the domestic level has substantial consequences for lobbying strategies and influence.

Three contributions on how interest groups strategically adjust their framing strategy to the characteristics of the DG in charge of a legislative proposal offer an illuminating insight into how institutional responsibility within the European Commission plays an important role for interest group lobbying (Eising *et al.*, 2015; Boräng and Naurin, 2015; Klüver *et al.*, 2015). Boräng and Naurin (2015) analyse frame congruence between Commission officials and either business or civil society interests respectively. They demonstrate that civil society groups are more likely to share views with Commission officials when many groups are involved in the process and media publicity is low. Next, Eising *et al.* (2015) examine how contextual factors affect the types of frames adopted by interest groups. They demonstrate that national institutional factors and policy characteristics affect both the number and type of frames that arise. Lastly, Klüver *et al.* (2015) study the determinants of interest groups' frame choices in EU policy debates and show that frame selection systematically varies across interest group type and the Directorates General in charge of drafting a policy proposal.

All the contributions have in common that, in identifying various explanatory factors, they tried to separate contextual factors from individual actor properties. Of course, we need to remain careful when making causal claims on whether and how contextual and actor properties are intertwined. Generally, emphasizing the importance of context does not mean that we believe that individual actor properties – such as resources or members – are irrelevant or

unimportant. Rather it implies a call for a much more contextualized understanding of how individual interest groups behave. Our conception of coalitions is an important example of this. Although we often rely (partially for methodological reasons) on observing individual interest groups, a contextualized approach means that our analytical focus of their policy impact will be situated at a more aggregate level such as coalitions or policy networks. In short, political influence and behaviour is more than the sum of individual groups and advocates; they profoundly affect each other.

Importantly, contextual factors and actor properties are not entirely separate sets of variables. For instance, the individual actor properties we often observe are themselves a result of contextual variables. The emergence of some interests groups, their resources and organizational properties can often be attributed to environmental conditions such as government or institutional patronage (Baumgartner *et al.* 2011; Berkhout *et al.* 2015; Leech *et al.* 2005; Mahoney and Beckstrand 2011). Also salience and conflict, which we defined as contextual factors, are not just exogenous and entirely unmalleable conditions, but can, to some extent, be the result of interest group lobbying (see also Beyers *et al.* [2015]). Interest groups could have been successful in shaping the policy agenda, and may thus have co-shaped the salience of specific policy issues. Moreover, what becomes salient depends on policy-makers who decide what is put on the policy agenda, which in turn attracts interest groups to mobilize in response to this growing attention (Toshkov *et al.* 2013: 50–3). Finally, interest groups can deliberately use outside lobbying to increase the salience of an issue among other interest groups and the general public (Kollman 1998).

Although unravelling the complex interaction between actor and context went beyond the goal of this collection, we are aware that context is not always fully exogenous. Importantly, some contextual variables are more exogenous than others. For instance, groups have little impact on basic institutional properties (for instance, which DG is in charge or which decision-making procedure is followed), at least not in the short run. Moreover, although full exogeneity cannot be presumed, the different context factors we presented are not only shaped by organized interests. Many other actors (member state governments, EU institutions, media gate keepers) shape the salience, complexity and conflictual nature of concrete policy issues. Overall, the processes that produce the overall social context within which individual groups operate are experienced by individual interest groups as an external constraint (or opportunity) to which they need to adapt.

In conclusion, this collection has demonstrated that interest group politics cannot be understood without carefully parsing out the contextual nature of lobbying. Moreover, it showed that the contextual factors we put forward in this introductory contribution can be analysed on the basis of sophisticated research designs that allow for systematically studying the effect of contextual factors across a large number of policy proposals and issues. All contributions have shown that both policy-related and institutional factors importantly account for variation in the mobilization, the strategies and the influence of interest

groups. Admittedly, although the contributions in this collection have shed important light on the effect of contextual factors on EU interest group politics, only a subset of the factors identified in this introduction could be analysed. Yet, we hope that our approach inspires future research to analyse the contextual nature of interest group mobilization, strategies and influence in the EU and beyond.

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## NOTES

- 1 See, for instance, a recent piece in *The Guardian* written during the European Parliament elections and fuelling the climate of Euroscepticism in the United Kingdom (<http://goo.gl/x0fgPC>).
- 2 See, for instance, a report in EuroActive (<http://goo.gl/jPRQ32>).
- 3 The contribution accordingly provides a conceptual framework for explaining variation of three dependent variables, namely the mobilization, the lobbying strategies and the influence of interest group on policy-making. We use the terms 'interest group politics' and 'interest group lobbying' as umbrella terms for interest group mobilization, lobbying strategies and influence.
- 4 INTEREURO is a European Collaborative Research Project, carried out by research teams in nine different countries, under the auspices of the European Science Foundation (2012–14; see the special issue of *Interest Groups and Advocacy* edited by David Lowery (volume 2, issue 3, 2014) <http://www.intereuro.eu>).
- 5 For more details regarding the sampling technique and its theoretical foundations, see Beyers *et al.* (2014).

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