

The role of lobbies in the process of European construction El papel de los lobbies en el proceso de construcción europea

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Abstract

In the process of European integration, citizens and organisations can participate through specialised bodies such as political parties, but also interest groups (Aron, 2020; Dür, Bernhagen and Marshall, 2015). This article shows how lobbies are using political communication tools to influence public institutions. This proposal aims to analyse the communication strategies of lobbies in Europe and which institutions they focus their activities on, the European Commission or the European Parliament. The aim is to find out the audiences with which they establish relations in their communication activities, to analyse which countries and which types of lobbies have the greatest presence in the register of interest groups, and how they manage their communication tools. To carry out this study, two research techniques were chosen, content analysis and survey, for which a stratified probabilistic sampling was carried out using the organisational typologies contemplated in the European Union Transparency Register as a stratum, obtaining 363 interest groups. Subsequently, for the content analysis, all registered lobbies related to both European institutions were chosen. The main findings reveal that the European Parliament is the main target of NGOs, trade union associations and companies, while employers' and academic associations focus their efforts on the European Commission. Business and employers' organisations have a stronger presence and influence in the European institutions than self-employed and faith-based organisations. Belgium is the country with the most registered lobbies. The lobbying sector is dominated by middle-aged men with legal training and professional experience who prefer direct lobbying and make marginal use of indirect lobbying tools.

Keywords: Lobby, Political Communication, European Union, European Parliament, European Commission

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Resumen

En el proceso de construcción europea los ciudadanos y las organizaciones pueden participar a partir de instancias especializadas como son los partidos políticos, pero también los grupos de interés (Aron, 2020; Dür, Bernhagen y Marshall, 2015). Este artículo muestra el uso que están haciendo los lobbies de las herramientas de comunicación política sobre las instituciones públicas. La presente propuesta persigue analizar cómo son las estrategias de comunicación de los lobbies en Europa y hacia qué instituciones focalizan sus acciones, Comisión Europea o Parlamento Europeo. Se plantean conocer los públicos con los que establecen relaciones en sus actividades de comunicación, analizar qué países y que tipología de lobbies tienen mayor presencia en el registro de grupos de interés, y cómo gestionan las herramientas de comunicación. Para llevar a cabo este estudio, se escogen dos técnicas de investigación, el análisis de contenido y la encuesta, para la que se ejecuta un muestreo probabilístico estratificado tomando como estrado las tipologías organizativas contempladas en el Registro de Transparencia de la Unión Europea, obteniendo 363 grupos de interés. Posteriormente, para el análisis de contenido se ha optado por la totalidad de lobbies inscritos que guardan relación con ambas instituciones europeas. Las principales conclusiones revelan que el Parlamento Europeo es el principal objetivo de las ONG, asociaciones sindicales y empresas, mientras que las asociaciones patronales y académicas centran sus esfuerzos en la Comisión Europea. Las empresas y patronales tienen una mayor presencia e influencia en las instituciones europeas que los trabajadores por cuenta propia y las organizaciones confesionales. Bélgica es el país con más lobbies registrados. El sector del lobby está dominado por hombres de mediana edad con formación jurídica y experiencia profesional que prefieren el lobby directo y hacen un uso marginal de las herramientas de lobby indirecto.

Palabras clave: Lobby, Comunicación política, Unión Europea, Parlamento Europeo, Comisión Europea.

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Sumario

1. Introducción 2. Marco teórico 3. Metodología 4. Resultados 5. Discusión y conclusiones 6. Referencias.

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of building Europe was based on institutional activities with the limited participation of social organisations in the dynamics of the Community. As a result, initiatives were taken to promote citizen participation in the activities of the European institutions. Thus, the Register of Interest Representatives was created to promote the participation of lobby groups and allow citizens and their representative organisations to be involved in EU institutions and take part in the drafting of regulations.

Lobbying is one of the professions that is becoming ever more important in political communication, and at a time when public authorities have gained ground in the processes of

regulating social dynamics (Dür, Bernhagen and Marshall, 2015; Chari and Hillebrand, 2011; Flöthe, 2019).

In its Transparency Register (2023), the EU defines lobbying as "all activities (...) carried out with the objective of directly or indirectly influencing the formulation or implementation of policy and the decision-making processes (...)".

Given that citizens see European institutions as distant and a barrier to citizen mobilisation, lobbies are developing more qualitative elements in their approach. The most common are the following:

1. Participating in administrative bodies of the Commission, either with the College of Commissioners or with the Directorates General that make up the Commission. It is worth noting that the number of civil servants assigned to the Commission is limited, so expert committees are usually set up on a permanent or ad hoc basis to deal with a wide range of subjects. These expert committees are open to lobbies registered in the Transparency Register which means that the best-organised lobbies can participate in many of them and help shape decisions that are then passed on to the executive levels.
2. Contacting Commissioners through employers' association lobbies to discuss issues related to the economic sectors. These lobbies include employers' associations of automobile companies, for example the Spanish-based Asociación Nacional de Fabricantes de Automóviles y Camiones (English: National Association of Car and Truck Manufacturers), (ANFAC). These top-level meetings focus on the strategic positions of the sectors involved.
3. Liaising with officials in the process of drafting specific regulations, presenting the sector's point of view, preparing supporting documents and proposing draft texts for consideration by officials. In this activity, the lobby's capacity for objectivity is essential in order to legitimise itself as a reliable entity that provides truthful information thus establishing itself as a valid interlocutor.
4. Contacting parliamentarians in order to discuss their proposals, provide information on the sector, establish personal relationships and, in short, take part in discussions and the drafting of regulations. All these activities can only be carried out by lobbyists if they are registered in the Transparency Register, the instrument that regulates lobby groups' access to Parliament and the European Commission.

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One of the most relevant aspects of the European Union are the contacts between representatives of the institution and interest groups. In this regard, there are mechanisms that structure these meetings, such as the Commission Decision of 25 November 2014 on the publication of information about meetings held between Members of the Commission and organisations or self-employed persons (Euratom, 2014). Article 1.1 states that "Members of the Commission shall make public information concerning all meetings held by them and members of their Cabinets with organisations or self-employed persons on issues relating to policy-making and implementation in the Union, in accordance with the provisions of this

Decision". Furthermore, there is an obligation of transparency concerning these meetings, with Article 1.2 requiring that "the date of the meeting, the location, the name of the Member of the Commission and/or member of the Cabinet, the name of the organisation or the self-employed individual and the subject of the meeting" be made public.

The impact of lobbies on the processes of proposing and implementing public policies has given rise to more dialogical and directional communication strategies focused on the management of a strategic approach to communication (Aron, 2020; Giger and Klüver, 2015; Almansa-Martínez & Fernández-Souto, 2020) with the creation of communication campaigns (Austen-Smith, 1993; De Bruycker and Beyers, 2019). In this respect, institutions must have the right information to ensure that their actions are as closely aligned as possible with societal needs. As such, the relationships with interest groups help to ensure that social organisations are involved in decision-making (Reh, Bressanelli and Koop, 2020).

The aim of this study is to find out where the communication strategies of lobbies in Europe are heading, what kind of relationships the lobbies registered for this purpose carry out, and how they manage communication.

2. THEORETICAL FRAME

Many institutional and social actors are involved in public policies as there is an increasing need to share this activity with the social organisations and citizens who are the beneficiaries of these policies. There is a two-way process that flows from state institutions to society and from society to state institutions (Castillo-Esparcia, Moreno-Cabanillas & Almansa-Martinez, 2023). Through this two-way interaction, an exchange of information and efforts to persuade take place between the interlocutors. The state wants its decisions to be accepted by social collectives, while social collectives want to participate in the processes and have their demands heard and, as far as possible, accepted.

In this double mechanism of reciprocal influences, the holders of political power have a greater decision-making capacity. To enable participation, spaces for discussion have been created, including formal meetings, advisory committees, and a presence in executive and/or legislative committees, all of which ensure fluidity. In these spheres, citizens are given a voice through lobby groups representing their interests.

At the European level, the mechanism modulating this participation is the Transparency Register, in which interest groups wishing to participate in public policy and decision-making processes must be registered. There are different types of organisations in this mechanism which are divided into fields of competence and classified according to areas of interest.

The Transparency Register was created to regulate the participation of interest groups. In 2011, the European Parliament and the European Commission created their Transparency Register through an agreement between the two institutions. This established a framework for transparency in the relations between lobby groups and the two institutions. The European Parliament and the European Commission also set up the Joint Secretariat of the Transparency Register to manage the Transparency Register.

The main idea behind the Transparency Register is that any organisation or person wishing to influence and participate in the process of developing and implementing EU public policies should be able to take part in the whole process. The register makes it possible to know

what types of organisations want to participate, what interests they wish to defend or legitimise, which organisations are involved in the defence of these interests and what financial and human resources they have to carry out their lobbying activities. All organisations participating in the Register must adhere to a code of conduct. It also allows for greater public scrutiny of the work of lobbyists, as it enables the media, citizens or any other actor in the European Union to know what lobby groups are doing and how they might influence the EU's legislative and executive process.

Inclusion in the register brings a number of benefits to lobbyists. In the European Parliament, these include access to the premises, the right to speak at public hearings of EP committees, receiving information on committee activities, joint organisation of events with the political parties in the Parliament, etc. In the case of the Commission, these include meetings with Commissioners, Cabinet members and Directors-General, public consultations (they are automatically notified of such consultations and given roadmaps in their chosen areas); expert groups (entry in the Register is required for the appointment of certain types of expert group members); contacts with officials for a meeting or an event.

As an example of the European Union's transparency policy and its importance for citizens and its own institutions, the Joint Secretariat of the Transparency Register offers information courses on how the Register works and the main aspects of lobbying. Within the European Parliament, for example, in 2019 there were 16 training sessions for parliamentary staff titled 'Who are Interest Representatives? Introduction to the Transparency Register'. Similarly, in 2019 the European Commission organised four training courses for its staff titled 'Dealing Appropriately and Effectively with Interest Representatives'.

Lobbying activities include direct lobbying (contacts with political representatives) and indirect lobbying (campaigns involving public opinion). In this study, we analyse direct lobbying activities and identify which European institution (the European Parliament and the Commission) they focus their activity on.

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to know the communication strategies of lobbies in Europe and identify which public institutions they target. To this end, we have set out a number of specific objectives:

- SO1: Identify the audiences with which they establish relations in their communication activities.
- SO2: Discover which countries have the highest number of lobbyists registered in the European Transparency Register.
- SO3: Identify which type of lobby has the greatest presence in the two European institutions and determine which country is the most active.
- SO4: Examine which communication tools are used and how they are managed.

This study is based on the hypothesis that economic interest organisations focus on strategies directed towards the European Commission, while social organisations plan activities in the European Parliament.

In order to contextualise the study, previous academic literature on lobbying and political communication in the European Union was reviewed. To achieve the proposed objectives, a

quantitative methodology was used based on two research techniques: content analysis and a survey.

Firstly, the content analysis was carried out using the total number of lobbyists registered in the European Union Transparency Register as a sample. This register, which is voluntary, aims to register all activities that seek to influence the decision-making processes of the EU institutions directly or indirectly, regardless of the means used to communicate. It is a database, whose objective is based on transparency and closer contact with citizens, in which it is made visible which interests are pursued by which organisations and what budget they have for this purpose. In this regard, a total of 4,721 lobbies were reviewed, which are active in both the European Parliament and the European Commission.

This study was possible due to the limited size and, above all, the high availability of the universe, which enabled information to be collected quickly.

In order to find out which countries are the most active in the European Union, an analysis of the different categories was made according to all the countries of the lobbies studied. This included 46 countries active in the European Commission and 77 countries active in the European Parliament.

In addition, a short questionnaire of seven closed questions with several possible answers was drawn up, covering variables related to the type of communication they carry out (unidirectional or bidirectional), the focus of attention (European Parliament and Commission), the most commonly used tools (meetings, media activities, use of social media) and on the academic and professional profiles of the lobbyists. In some cases, a Likert scale was used to indicate the frequency of the activity: never - rarely - sometimes - often - always.

Stratified probability sampling was used to carry out the research. The organisational typologies included in the EU Register of Interest Representatives was used as a base. The multiplication coefficient for each category is 0.03, which applied to a universe of 12,135 interest groups gives us a sample of 363 groups, for a confidence level of 95%. The distribution of the categorised sample is as follows:

Table 1. Distribution of the selected sample by category

Category	No. Of group of interest
Professional consultancies and law firms	23
Companies and trade associations	167
Trade unions and professional associations	29
Non-governmental organisations	101
Think tanks and academic and research institutions	25
Religious organisations	1
Local, regional and municipal organisations	18

Source: own elaboration.

This short survey was sent in September 2022 and February 2023 to the email addresses obtained from each lobby group's websites. A total of 223 responses were received.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Content analysis

The following information was extracted from the European Transparency Register on registered lobbies associated with both the European Parliament and the European Commission.

First, our aim was to determine which of the categories defined in the methodology had the highest number of registered organisations, and taking into account whether their activities were directed towards the Parliament or the Commission.

In this context, Table 2 shows that NGOs (35.80%) have the greatest presence in the European Parliament. In second place are companies and groups (20.98%). In third and fourth place are trade and business associations (18.42%) and trade unions and professional associations (8%), respectively. With regards the Commission, trade associations (31.38%) are in first place, NGOs (28.30%) in second place, and companies and groups (18.49%) in third place. Again, trade unions are in fourth place (8.73%). These four categories are therefore the most important, regardless of whether activities are directed towards the Parliament or the Commission, and they are in the top positions in terms of the number of lobbies.

The categories with the lowest number of registered lobbyists in the Parliament are law firms (0.43%), while in the Commission, it is the self-employed (0.05%), with only one registered group directing their activities towards this institution.

Finally, entities, offices or networks established by third countries have no lobby groups directing their activities towards the Commission or the Parliament. Likewise, faith-based organisations have no registered lobby groups targeting the Commission.

It is worth noting that in 11 out of the 13 categories analysed, activities are directed towards the Parliament, with a total of 2,774 (58.76%) lobbies compared to 1,947 (41.26%) for the European Commission.

In terms of the countries with the highest number of registered lobbies (see Table 3), there is a clear difference between Belgium, as the hub of the European Union, and the remaining countries. As mentioned above, there are usually more lobbies targeting the Parliament, but they are ranked in practically in the same order from the first to the seventh place, with the order being: Belgium, Germany, France, in the first, second, and third places, respectively and Spain or the Netherlands in the fourth and/or fifth place, followed by the UK and Italy. At the bottom of the top 10 are the US, Sweden, Austria and Switzerland, although only in the European Parliament.

Table 2. Distribution of registered lobbies by category and by public institution to which they direct their actions

CATEGORY	EUROPEAN COMMISSION	EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT	EC + EP
Professional consultancies	20	113	133
Law firms	7	12	19
Self-employed individuals	1	25	26
Companies & groups	360	582	942
Trade and business associations	611	511	1122
Trade unions and professional associations	170	222	392
Non-governmental organisations, platforms and networks and similar	551	993	1544
Think tanks and research institutions	91	107	198
Academic institutions	63	47	110
Organisations representing churches and religious communities	0	22	22
Associations and networks of public authorities	29	49	78
Entities, offices or networks established by third countries	0	0	0
Other organisations, public or mixed entities	44	91	135
Total	1.947	2.774	4.721

Source: own elaboration³.

As regards professional consultancies, there are similarities and differences between the two institutions. On the one hand, Belgium is still the country with the most registered lobbies in both cases. However, the Netherlands is also in first place in the Commission. Italy is in second place (EC n=4; EP n=12). Austria, the UK (n=2) and Spain (n=11) are in third place in the Commission and Parliament, respectively. Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, the US and Poland (n=1) are in last place in the Commission's top 5. In fourth place in the European Parliament is the United Kingdom with 10 lobbies. Finally, France (n=9) is in the last place in the Parliament.

It is interesting to note the differences in the category of law firms, where the US has 2 lobbies linked to the Commission. In the case of the Parliament, Germany and the US (n=3) have the most registered lobbies. On the other hand, Spain, Italy, Poland, Romania and the UK (n=1)

³ Data extraction: March 19, 2023.

are linked with the Commission, while Congo, Belgium, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal and the UK (n=1) are associated with the Parliament.

Table 3. Ranking of the countries with the highest number of registered lobbies by public institution to which they direct their actions
European Commission European Parliament

<i>Rank</i>	Country	Fq	Country	Fq
<i>1st</i>	Belgium	709	Belgium	635
<i>2nd</i>	Germany	214	Germany	328
<i>3rd</i>	France	149	France	257
<i>4th</i>	Netherlands	118	Spain	193
<i>5th</i>	Spain	103	Netherlands	185
<i>6th</i>	United Kingdom	95	United Kingdom	153
<i>7th</i>	Italy	80	Italy	149
<i>8th</i>	Sweden	50	USA	109
<i>9th</i>	USA	38	Switzerland and Austria	63
<i>10th</i>	Austria	37	Sweden	53

Source: own elaboration.

Regarding the self-employed, the Commission has only one lobby group from Austria. However, in contrast to the above data, the following countries participate in the Parliament in the following order: Belgium (n=8), France (n=3), Germany, Austria and Italy (n=2), and Finland, Hong Kong, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and Sweden (n=1).

The category of companies and groups was also analysed. This category differs from the others in that Belgium is not among the top 5 countries with the highest number of companies. However, several countries can be found in both institutions: Germany (EC n=76; EP n=87), France (EC n=45; EP n=63), Spain (EC n=35; EP n=42) and the Netherlands (EC n=28; EP n=46). Italy and the US are the countries that differ in this category, with Italy (n=30) ranking fourth in the Commission and the US (n=56) ranking third in the European Parliament.

Similarly, in trade and business associations there are four of the five countries in the top 5 of the two European institutions: Belgium (EC n=360; EP n=191), Germany (EC n=53; EP n=75), Spain (EC n=17; EP n=38) and the United Kingdom (EC n=26; EP n=28). With regards the others, Italy (n=23) ranks fifth in the Parliament, while in the Commission, France (n=25) and the Netherlands (n=29) rank third and fourth, respectively. With the exception of Belgium, in this category all positions are similar in terms of number of lobbies.

As regards trade unions and professional associations, the countries are the same in both institutions, although in different order and frequency. Also, Sweden is included in the

Commission with the same frequency as Spain. However, Belgium and France rank first and second respectively in both institutions. For the Commission, the order is as follows: Germany (n=9), Italy (n=7) and Spain and Sweden (n=5); on the other hand, in the Parliament the order is: Italy (n=20), Spain (n=16) and Germany (n=11).

For NGOs and similar organisations, platforms and networks, the situation is the same as before, with the same countries in the top 5 and in this case in the same order, with the addition of the UK in the European Commission. In this regard, Belgium (EC n=202; EP n=248) and Germany (EC n=53; EP n=92) are in first and second place, respectively. The UK (EC n=41) and the Netherlands (EC n=38; EP n=86) are in third place, followed by France (EC n=33; EP n=77) and then Spain (EC n=29; EP n=58). There is a marked difference between Belgium and the other countries in this category.

The data for think tanks and research institutions are very similar, both in terms of frequency and in terms of the countries with the highest number of lobbies in this category. In both institutions we find the order is: Belgium (EC n=22; EP n=17), Germany (EC n=14; EP n=17), France (EC n=11; EP n=10), Italy (EC n=7; EP n=12) and the Netherlands (EC n=8; EP n=7). In the European Parliament, Spain (n=7) is also included in fifth place.

Regarding the academic institutions, there is very little repetition of countries. Six countries appear in the ranking of both institutions, but in a very different order. For the European Commission the order is: the Netherlands (n=9), Germany (n=6), Sweden (n=5), Belgium, Spain, Italy and Poland (n=4) and Greece and Romania (n=3). For the Parliament the ranking is: the UK (n=7), Italy and the Netherlands (n=6), Sweden (n=5), Germany, Spain and France (n=4) and Austria, Belgium, Ireland and Switzerland (n=2).

As regards organisations representing churches and religious communities, we only found lobbies registered in the European Parliament. The order is as follows: Belgium (n=11), Germany (n=6) and, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Spain, Italy and Switzerland (n=1).

There are very few lobbies registered in the category of public authority networks and associations. In this category, Belgium (EC n=16; EP n=10), France (EC n=6; EP n=8), Germany (EC n=3; EP n=8) and Spain (EC n=2; EP n=3) are repeated. However, the European Commission also includes Slovakia, and Poland (n=1), while the Parliament includes the Netherlands (n=3), Croatia, Denmark and Italy (n=2) and Austria, Finland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Slovakia, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago and Turkey (n=1), most of which appear in the top 5 for the first time.

Finally, as regards other organisations and public or public-private entities, there are several differences between the two institutions in terms of order. In the top 5 of the European Commission, Belgium (n=8) and Germany (n=6) are in first and second place, respectively, followed by Austria, Spain, France and the Netherlands (n=5) in third place, Slovakia (n=4) in fourth place, and finally Finland (n=2). For the European Parliament, the order is Germany (n=13), Spain (n=12), Belgium, France and Italy (n=11), Finland and the Netherlands (n=6) and Sweden (n=4).

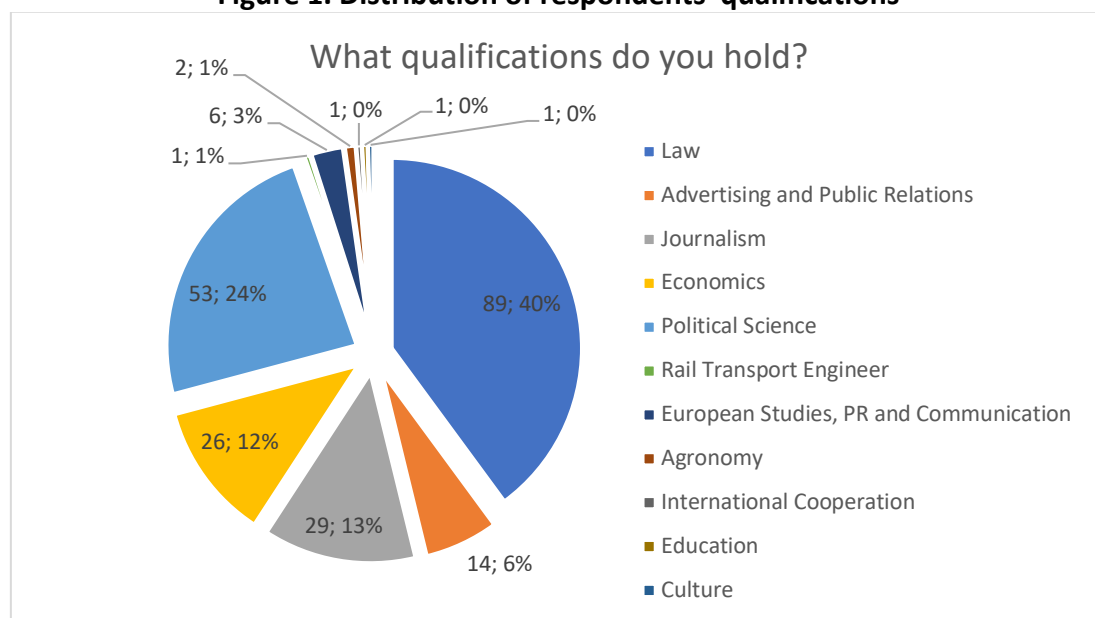
4.2. Survey

The profile of the institutional relations staff who responded to the survey is generally male (n=129) aged between 40 and 49 (42.60%, n=95) with a background in law (39.91%, n=89) and with between 11 and 20 years of experience (39.01%, n=87).

There are also more male lobbyists (57.85%) than female lobbyists (42.15%). However, the difference in terms of age is greater. Thus, 25.56% (n=57) of the respondents are between 50 and 59 years old, while a similar number, (21.52%, n=48), are between 30 and 39 years old. A smaller number of lobbyists are under 30 years old (7.17%, n=16) and only 3.14% (n=7) are over 60.

Figure 1 shows that lobbyists also hold degrees in political science (23.77%, n=53), journalism (13%, n=29), economics (11.66%, n=26) and advertising and public relations (6.28%, n=14), among others, although to a lesser extent.

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents' qualifications



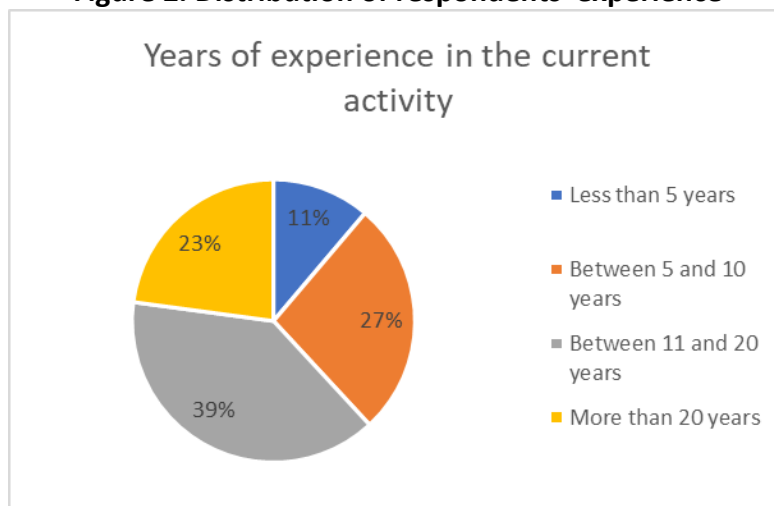
Source: own elaboration.

Moreover, although the vast majority have between 11 and 20 years of experience, there is a large number of respondents with between 5 and 10 years of experience (26.90%, n=60).

A similar percentage of lobbyists (22.87%, n=51) have a high level of experience, i.e. more than 20 years.

Finally, the results show that (11.21%, n=25) of public relations employees have been in the sector a relatively short time, i.e. less than 5 years (see Figure 2).

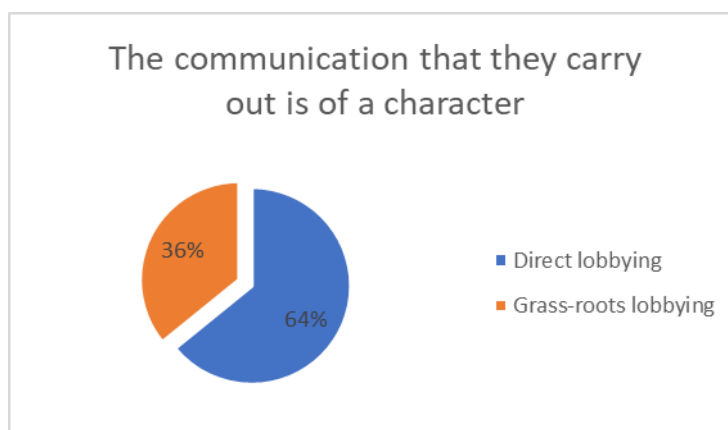
Figure 2. Distribution of respondents' experience



Source: own elaboration.

The majority of the lobbyists have more direct communications with the institutions, with 64.13% (n=143) of respondents engaging in direct lobbying and making direct contact with members of the European Commission or the European Parliament, compared to 35.87% (n=80) who carry out grassroots lobbying, organising social mobilisations in support of the interest group's demands (see Figure 3). We also obtained the average of the responses to the question "Which institution do you focus your activities and attention on, and in what percentage?". The European Commission was in first place with 33.18% (n=74), while there is a slightly lower percentage of focus on the European Parliament with 25.11% (n=56).

Figure 3. Distribution of the type of lobbying carried out by respondents



Source: own elaboration.

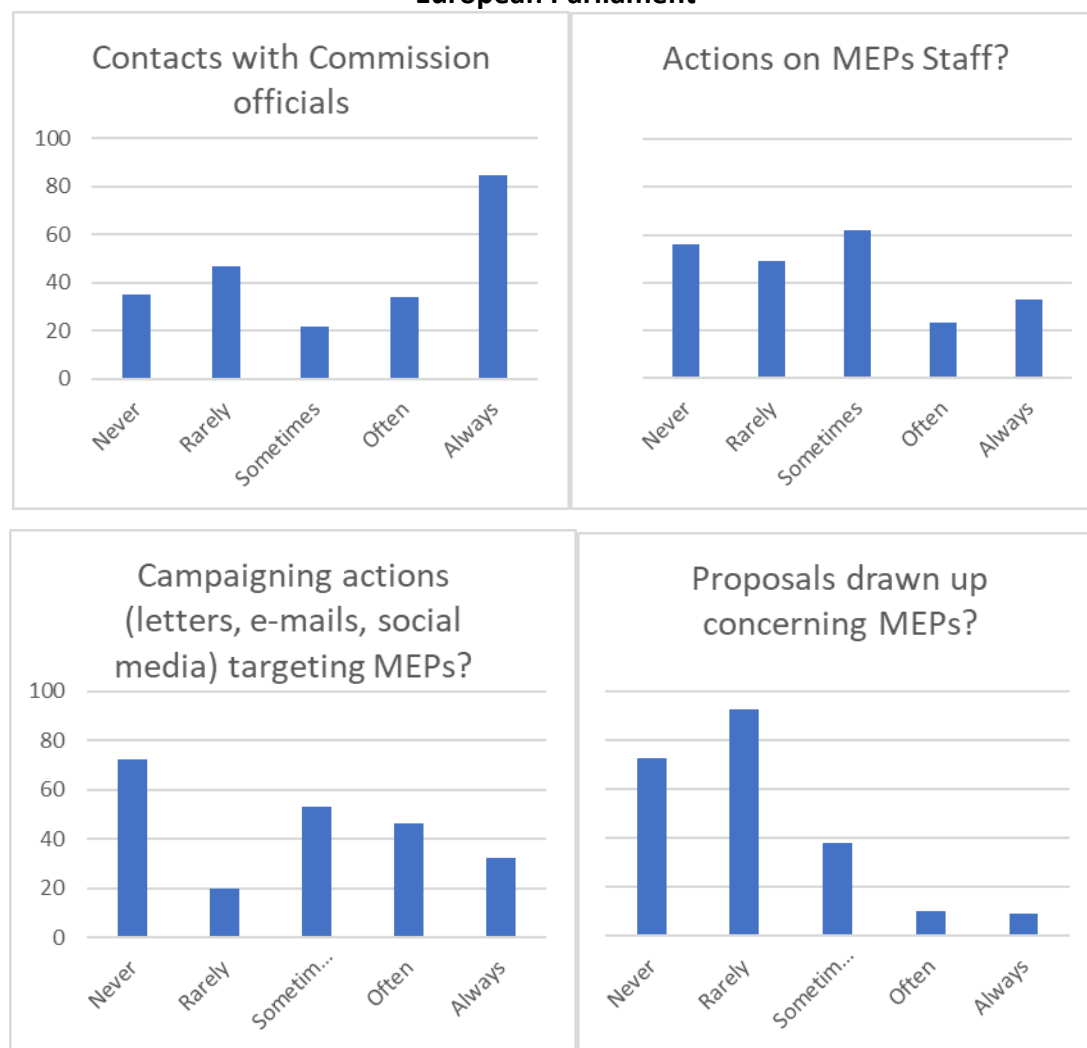
With regard to the direct lobbying tools most frequently used by the respondents, we found that they are mainly concerned with contacting Commission officials, with about two thirds of respondents saying they sometimes, often or always do this (Always 38.12%, n=85 - Often 15.25%, n=34 - Sometimes 9.87%, n=22).

Moreover, they do not usually carry out activities targeting MEPs in such high proportions, with half of the respondents saying that they never use them or rarely carry out these activities (Rarely 21.97%, n=49 - Never 25.11%, n=56) compared to 25.11% who often or always do so

(Always 14.80%, n=33 - Often 10.31%, n=23). However, a higher proportion, 27.80% (n=62), reported sometimes using this tool.

Similarly, promoting campaigns through letters, emails and social networks, etc. aimed at MEPs is not adopted by all with the same frequency. While 34.98% always use them (Always 14.35%, n=32 - Often 20.63%, n=46), 32.92% (n=72) never use these tools. However, 23.77% (n=53) sometimes use mailing and social media campaigns, while only 8.97% (n=20) rarely do (see figures 4, 5, 6 and 7).

Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7. Distribution of responses on direct lobbying tools in relation to the European Parliament



Source: own elaboration.

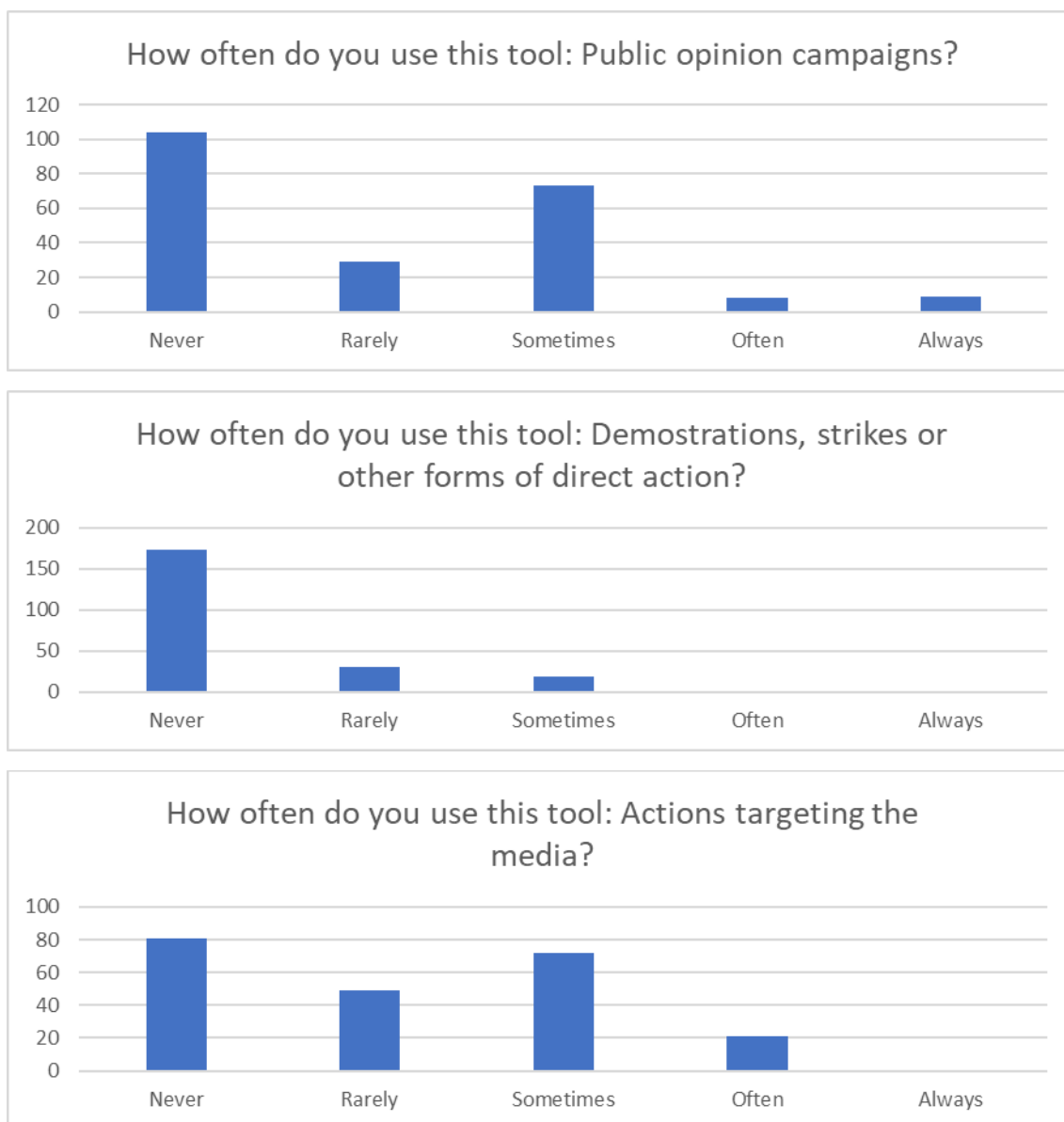
Furthermore, grassroots lobbying tools are either rarely used or not used at all (see figures 8, 9 and 10). In this regard, Figure 8 shows that more than half of the respondents either never (46.64%, n=104) or very rarely (13%, n=29) carry out public opinion campaigns. Also, 32.74% (n=73) of the respondents have sometimes carried out public opinion campaigns and less than 8% make constant use of this tool (Always 4.04%, n=9 - Often 3.59%, n=8).

Demonstrations, strikes or other forms of direct action related to grassroots lobbying are the tools least used by lobbyists, as the vast majority, 91.48%, have never or rarely used them

(Rarely 13.90%, n=31 - Never 77.58%, n=173) and only 8.52% (n=19) have used them at some point.

In addition, activities aimed at the media are rarely carried out by the participants in the questionnaire. Thus, 36.32% (n=81) say they never use these activities and 21.97% (n=49) use them rarely. Only 9.42% (n=21) of the respondents indicated that they frequently carry out activities aimed at the media. On the other hand, 32.29% (n=72) said that they do this occasionally.

Figures 8, 9 and 10. Distribution of responses on Grass-roots lobbying tools



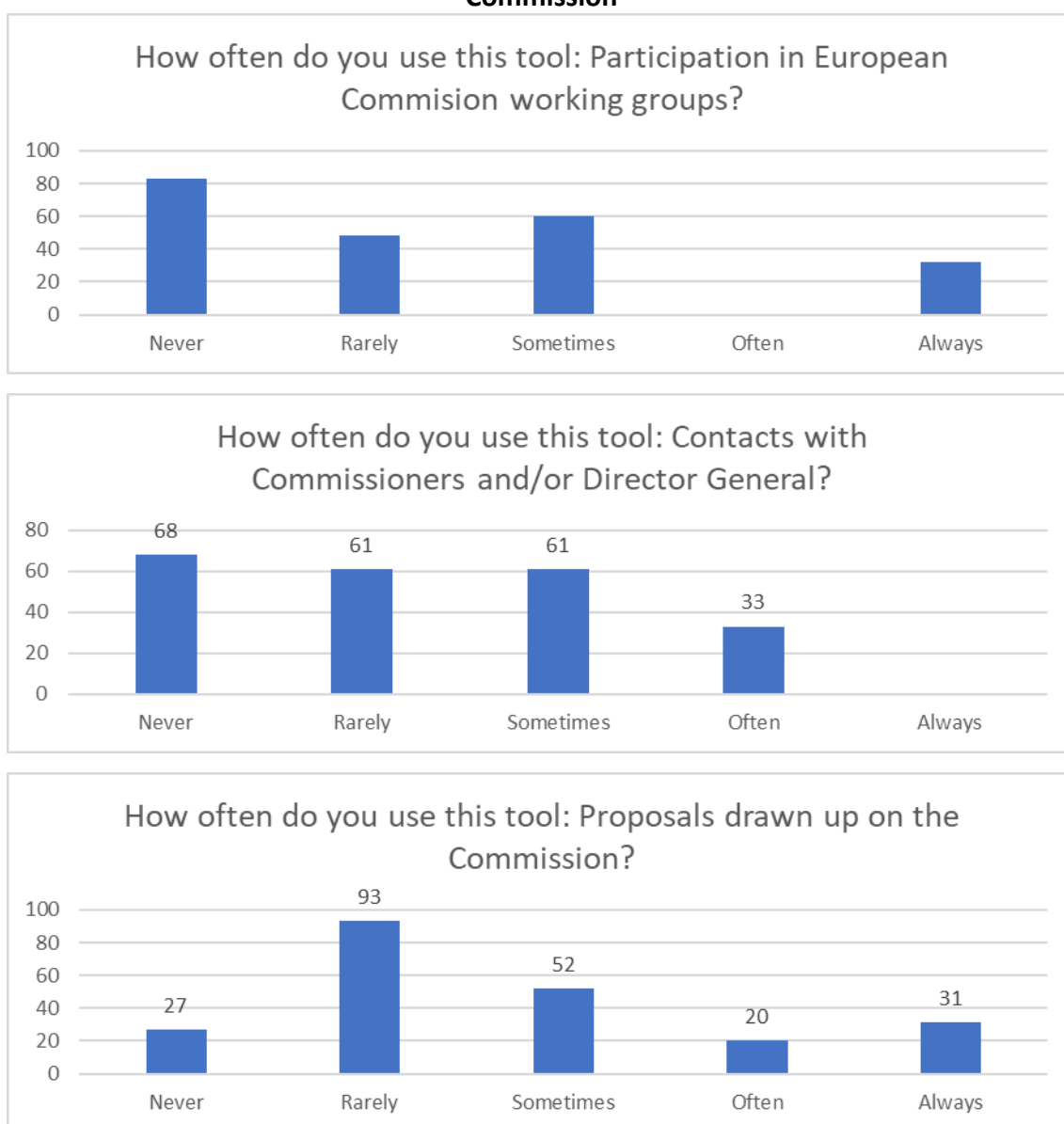
Source: own elaboration.

The tools directed towards the European Commission (see figures 11, 12 and 13), such as participation in working groups, are not widely used by the lobbyists surveyed, with more than half (58.74%) never or very rarely using them (Rarely 21.52%, n=48 - Never 37.22%, n=83). On the other hand, 26.91% (n=60) always participate in the working groups of the European public institution and only 14.35% (n=32) sometimes do so.

In addition, 30.49% (n=68) of respondents never submit proposals to the Commission and 27.35% (n=61) do so very occasionally. The same percentage of lobbyists sometimes submit proposals, while 14.80% (n=33) do so frequently. There are large disparities in the responses, although a moderate use of both tools can be observed.

Finally, with regard to the contacts made with Commissioners and/or Directors-General, we found different results. Thus, respondents who rarely make these contacts (41.70%, n=93) and those who sometimes do so (23.32%, n=52) stand out. Similar percentages are found for those who always make use of contacts with Commissioners and/or Directors-General (13.90%, n=31) and those who never make use of them (12.11%, n=27). Finally, only 8.97% (n=20) often make contact with these officials of the European public institution.

Figures 11, 12 and 13. Distribution of direct lobbying responses in relation to the European Commission



Source: own elaboration.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of which European institution is the focus of lobbying activities shows that the European Parliament is the focus of action for NGOs, trade union associations and companies. In contrast, employers' associations and academic institutions, concentrate their efforts on activities directed towards the European Commission, although they still target the Parliament. This may indicate that NGOs are more concerned with influencing elected representatives, while trade and business associations prefer to target policy makers directly.

Across all interest groups active in both institutions, around 35% of the registered groups reported having specific activities for both the European Parliament and the European Commission. Among these institutions, the Parliament is slightly ahead of the Commission, with 2,774 groups lobbying the Parliament and 1,947 lobbying the Commission.

While companies and employers' associations or trade unions have a large number of registered lobbies carrying out activities in the Commission and the Parliament, the self-employed or faith-based organisations have a very low presence in the Transparency Register, especially in the Commission. This could be because these professionals have fewer resources and less capacity to lobby the European institutions. There is great deal of diversity and unevenness in the presence and influence of lobbies in the European institutions due to their origin, nature and objectives. Lobbies representing civil society, knowledge or religions have a smaller presence than those representing economic, professional or political interests.

Belgium is the country with the most registered lobbies in both the European Parliament and the European Commission, as Brussels is the administrative and political centre of the European Union and home to many European headquarters and institutions. The other countries with the highest number of lobbyists in most categories in both the European Commission and the European Parliament are, in order, Germany, France, Spain, the Netherlands and Italy. It is worth noting that these are some of the most populous countries, which may reflect their economic and social weight in the European Union. Countries outside the EU, such as the US and Switzerland, have a smaller but significant presence in the Transparency Register. This may indicate that these countries wish to influence European decisions that affect them or maintain good relations with the EU.

According to the findings, the lobbying sector is dominated by middle-aged men with legal backgrounds and extensive professional experience. However, there is an increasing professionalisation of female lobbyists. The educational backgrounds of lobbyists also include degrees in political science, economics and journalism, although to a much lesser extent. Their main line of action is direct lobbying, i.e. they prefer direct contact with officials and representatives of the European institutions rather than mobilising public opinion through social campaigns. This may be due to the greater effectiveness and speed of direct lobbying in influencing political decision-making. They use different direct lobbying tools depending on their target. While contacting Commission officials is a common and often-used practice, contacting MEPs or promoting campaigns aimed at them is much less common or undertaken on an occasional or rare basis.

In general, their indirect lobbying actions are marginal and make little use of grassroots lobbying, i.e. mobilising public opinion through social campaigns, demonstrations, strikes or targeted media activities. This may be due to a lack of resources, time or willingness on the part of lobbyists to organise this type of activity, which requires greater coordination and citizen participation. However, they miss out on the benefits and opportunities offered by grassroots lobbying tools to raise awareness and inform the public about the issues that affect them and to gain more social support and put greater pressure on political representatives. This can limit the scope and legitimacy of their demands and proposals submitted to the European institutions. In general, lobbyists in Spain make very uneven and selective use of the available lobbying tools to influence political decision-making at the European level. They prefer more direct and informal lobbying tools, such as personal contacts with political representatives or bilateral meetings, which allow them to build relationships of trust and credibility.

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