

## Interests groups access in the EU's portfolio-based governance

### Acceso de los grupos de interés al proceso de formulación de políticas en la UE basado en portfolios

Álvaro Serna-Ortega<sup>1</sup> | [ORCID ID](#)

[ams@uma.es](mailto:ams@uma.es)

Aritz Gorostiza-Cerviño<sup>2</sup> | [ORCID ID](#)

[olivetti03@uma.es](mailto:olivetti03@uma.es)

Andrea Moreno-Cabanillas<sup>3</sup> | [ORCID ID](#)

[amorenoc@uma.es](mailto:amorenoc@uma.es)

Universidad de Málaga

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#### Abstract

The European Union emphasizes transparency and accountability as fundamental pillars of democracy, with the European Transparency Register serving as a clear example of the efforts made in this regard. These principles are crucial for preventing corruption, fostering citizen participation, and ensuring effective decision-making, all of which are vital for maintaining public trust in EU institutions. This study explores the meeting patterns between the European Commission and registered interest groups, seeking to establish a relationship between the economic or social nature of the portfolios and the interests represented by the entities they meet with. It hypothesizes a correlation between the economic nature of Commission officials' portfolios and their frequent meetings with interest groups defending material interests. Conversely, officials overseeing social portfolios are expected to meet more frequently with organizations that advocate for immaterial interests. Using a longitudinal analytical-descriptive approach, this study analyzes 24,587 registered meetings from November 2014 to October 2023, covering two legislative terms of the European Union. The results reveal that European Commission officials, regardless of portfolio type, predominantly meet with groups representing material interests, contradicting the expectation that social portfolios engage more with immaterial groups. This underscores the strong influence of economic interests on EU policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Álvaro Serna-Ortega is research staff in training (FPU 2023) of the Department of Advertising and Audiovisual Communication of the University of Malaga, España. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5374-4722>

<sup>2</sup> Aritz Gorostiza-Cerviño is research staff in training (FPU 2022) of the Department of Advertising and Audiovisual Communication of the University of Malaga, España. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7844-0036>

<sup>3</sup> Andrea Moreno-Cabanillas is contracted teaching and research staff of the Department of Advertising and Audiovisual Communication of the University of, España. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1169-1607>. Main contact for editorial correspondence.

**Keywords:** lobbying, interest groups, European Union, policy-making, governance, public relations.

### Resumen

La Unión Europea enfatiza la transparencia y la rendición de cuentas como pilares fundamentales de la democracia, y el Registro de Transparencia de la Unión Europea es un claro ejemplo de los esfuerzos realizados en este sentido. Estos principios son cruciales para prevenir la corrupción, fomentar la participación ciudadana y garantizar una toma de decisiones eficaz, elementos esenciales para mantener la confianza pública en las instituciones de la UE. Este estudio explora los patrones de reuniones entre la Comisión Europea y los grupos de interés registrados, buscando establecer una relación entre la naturaleza económica o social de las carteras y los intereses representados por las entidades con las que se reúnen. Se formula la hipótesis de una correlación entre la naturaleza económica de las carteras de los funcionarios de la Comisión y su frecuencia de reuniones con grupos de interés que defienden intereses materiales. Por el contrario, se espera que los funcionarios que supervisan carteras sociales se reúnan con mayor frecuencia con organizaciones que abogan por intereses inmateriales. Empleando un enfoque analítico-descriptivo longitudinal, este estudio analiza 24,587 reuniones registradas desde noviembre de 2014 hasta octubre de 2023, abarcando dos legislaturas de la Unión Europea. Los resultados revelan que los funcionarios de la Comisión Europea, independientemente del tipo de cartera, se reúnen predominantemente con grupos que representan intereses materiales, lo que contradice la expectativa de que las carteras sociales se involucren más con grupos inmateriales. Esto subraya la fuerte influencia de los intereses económicos en las políticas de la UE.

**Palabras clave:** lobbying, grupos de interés, Unión Europea, formulación de políticas, gobernanza, relaciones con los públicos.

### Summary

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### Sumario

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union is undergoing a gradual transformation in its efforts to strengthen cooperation and solidarity among member states, evolving into a highly complex political and economic entity (Hix and Høyland, 2022; Hurka and Haag, 2020; Hurka et al., 2022). The supranational decision-making process encompasses both legislative and political aspects and involves a diverse array of actors with varying interests and perspectives (Egenhofer et al., 2009; Peterson, 1995). In this context, interest groups have increasingly taken on a prominent role in shaping European public policies (Bombardini and Trebbi, 2019; Dür and Mateo, 2012; Moreno-Cabanillas and Castillo-Esparcia, 2023).

These organizations often function as intermediaries between civil society and the stages of deliberation and policy implementation (Andersen and Eliassen, 1995), representing specific sectors of the population with shared interests (Castillo-Esparcia, 2011). Advocating for a broad range of perspectives, these groups reflect social diversity while striving to influence legislative outcomes (Greenwood, 2017; Saurugger, 2008; Wirtz et al., 2019). They are particularly relevant in the European context, where institutions recognize the necessity of collaborating with various actors, including political parties, interest groups, and the media, given the impossibility of implementing policies unilaterally (Castillo-Esparcia and Almansa-Martínez, 2011; Dinan, 2021; Drieghe et al., 2022; Peterson and Godby, 2020).

The influence of interest groups in this landscape warrants analysis from multiple perspectives (Lowery, 2013). Within the internal dynamics of these entities, five key dimensions can be identified that determine their success: available economic resources (Almansa-Martínez et al., 2022; Hernández-Vigueras, 2013; Woll, 2019), the ability to mobilize supporters (Bernhagen and Trani, 2012; Walker, 2012), the willingness to form alliances with similarly focused groups (Grose et al., 2022), the alignment of their claims with prevailing social norms (Ihlen and Raknes, 2020; Scott, 2014) and access to decision-makers (Bouwen, 2002; Hirsch et al., 2023). These five dimensions are interdependent, and the organization's opportunities, based on its position in each of them, are largely shaped by the connections between them.

This research focuses on one of these dimensions by analyzing the dynamics of interest group access to policymakers within the European Commission. Specifically, it seeks to explore how the nature of the portfolios held by European Commission officials affects the frequency and nature of their meetings with interest groups. In other words, it aims to explore how the material or immaterial nature of a group's interests affects its approach to economically or socially oriented portfolios.

To this end, the theoretical framework presented below delves into the five dimensions of direct conditioning presented earlier (1.1) and highlights the stratified nature of European governance, considering both the perspectives of interest groups (1.2) and the portfolios themselves (1.3). Throughout the section, classification criteria are established to guide the subsequent analysis, categorizing interest groups based on whether they advocate for material or immaterial interests and categorizing portfolios based on their social or economic nature.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Access of interest groups to decision-makers from a multidimensional approach**

As mentioned, this study focuses on exploring the connection between the nature of interest groups' interests and the areas they seek to influence in their interactions with legislators of the European Commission. Then, it examines a key conditioning dimension that affects how much these organizations can shape European public policy: access to decision-makers. Evaluating this dimension requires a multifaceted approach that recognizes and assesses various elements contributing to disparities among groups (Gallagher et al., 2017).

Beyond their organizational characteristics, financial power plays a significant role in a group's ability to participate in decision-making processes. Economic capacity undoubtedly

determines the effectiveness of interest groups in implementing their strategies and is crucial in shaping the techniques they employ (Almansa-Martínez et al., 2022; De Bruycker and Colli, 2023; Woll, 2019). Moreover, groups with available economic resources tend to advocate for material interests. Various researchers, including Benson and Jordan (2015), have noted a structural pressure on legislators to favor economic development, which may lead to a greater tendency for interaction with financially resourceful groups.

From a more subjective perspective, the mobilization of supporters is another factor that clarifies interest groups' capacity to exert influence. Uniting followers and members demonstrates social backing for their demands, which is important in various contexts (Turnbull-Dugarte et al., 2022; Walker, 2012). This social support can trigger greater attention to the groups' claims from decision-makers. Closely related to this, proposals that align with social norms and public demands are more likely to gain support from decision-makers and resonate with the broader community (Ihlen and Raknes, 2020; Richan, 2013). This correlation exists because proposals that reflect prevailing societal values are often viewed as more legitimate and equitable, facilitating their acceptance. Understanding social values and expectations enables interest groups to craft strategies that are politically astute and socially resonant, enhancing their reputation, legitimacy, and credibility, ultimately increasing their long-term political influence (Bernhagen et al., 2022).

The organization's willingness to form alliances with groups that share similar interests can also be necessary for accessing legislators. By collaborating with like-minded organizations, interest groups can amplify their voices and increase their visibility in the policy-making process (Grose et al., 2022). These partnerships allow them to pool resources and expertise, strengthening their influence in advocating for their goals. Additionally, such alliances signal to decision-makers that there is broad support for specific issues, making legislators more likely to engage with these coalitions.

Overall, the ability to identify and access public authorities is a complex phenomenon with many interrelated aspects that must be taken into account. As Holman and Luneburg (2012) emphasize, interactions should not be oversimplified; rather, they serve as valuable tools for persuasion. The conduct of these meetings and the proposed actions are equally important. Strategies must be adaptable to align with the profiles and responsibilities of the individuals involved, highlighting the necessity of accurately identifying the actual decision-makers (Hirsch et al., 2023; Junk et al., 2022). To accomplish this, diligent and professional preparatory work is crucial.

## **2.2. Classifying EU interest groups by material or immaterial interests**

Categorizing interest groups is challenging and generally restrictive. Although scientific literature has presented various classifications (Anastasiadis, 2014; Graziano, 2001; Gurvitch, 1950; Hall, 1969; Nicoll, 2007; Ortuño, 2022), this study chooses to use the self-definition provided by the groups themselves in their registration forms for the European Union's Transparency Register. This selection is justified by the fact that the data related to interactions with legislators has also been obtained from official sources of the European Union. Therefore, this approach facilitates analysis and increases the representativeness of the results.

The Transparency Register is a regulatory mechanism that serves as an important tool to control and limit the presence of interest groups in the bureaucratic processes of European institutions (Dinan, 2021; Greenwood and Dreger, 2013). Organizations seeking to intervene in public policy formulation are required to adhere to this register. Therefore, their acceptance and adherence are necessary for their effective participation on public construction.

Currently, the Register includes active participation from over 12,000 organizations across 13 categories of interest groups. For the purposes of this research, these 13 categories have been further delineated according to the specific interests they encompass. The classification criteria differentiate between categories representing groups with material interests and those representing groups with immaterial interests. The distribution is as follows:

**Table 1. Classification of EU interest groups based on their material or immaterial interests**

<b>Interest groups with material interests</b>	<b>Interest groups with immaterial interests</b>
Companies and groups	NGOs and similar organizations
Professional consultancies	Other organizations, public or mixed entities
Law firms	Think tanks and research institutions
Trade unions and professional associations	Academic institutions
Trade and business associations	Associations and networks of public authorities
Entities, offices or networks by third countries	Organizations in the religious sector
Self-employed individuals	-

Source: own elaboration.

### **2.3. Classifying European Commission portfolios by economic or social nature**

Moreover, the European Union's distinctive structure and organization are reflected in its institutions, which operate collaboratively with co-decision powers (Niето, 2006). The institutions responsible for leading the administration of the supranational entity are four: the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission. They collaborate together and respect their individual functions within the legislative framework.

This research focuses on the meetings held between interest groups and members of the European Commission, where the Commission's structural setup enables comprehensive coverage, providing specific entry points for the actions of these interest groups (Coen, 2007). The design of this institution, which includes commissioners and portfolios, offers opportunities for organizations to participate and shape policies aligned with their objectives.

Based on the categorization of organizations presented in the previous section, it is proposed to differentiate portfolios according to whether their interests are economic or social in nature:

**Table 2. Classification of European Commission portfolios based on their economic or social nature**

<b>Portfolios 2014-2019</b>	<b>Portfolios 2019-2024</b>	<b>Nature</b>
President of the Commission	President of the Commission	-
Foreign Affairs and Security Policy	A Stronger Europe in the World	Social
Better Regulation, Inter-Institutional Relations, the Rule of Law, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights	Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight	Social
Budget and Human Resources	Budget and Administration	Economic
Digital Single Market	A Europe Fit for the Digital Age	Economic
Energy Union	Energy	Economic
Euro and Social Dialogue	Jobs and Social Rights	Social
Jobs, Growth, Investment, and Competitiveness	Economy	Economic
Agriculture and Rural Development	Agriculture	Economic
Climate Action and Energy	Climate Action	Economic
Competition	Competition	Economic
Digital Economy and Society	A Europe Fit for the Digital Age	Economic
Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs	Financial Services, Financial Stability, and the Capital Markets Union	Economic
Education, Culture, Youth, and Citizenship	Innovation, Research, Culture, Education, and Youth	Social
Employment, Social Affairs, Skills, and Labour Mobility	Jobs and Social Rights	Social
Environment, Maritime Affairs, and Fisheries	Environment, Oceans and Fisheries	Economic
European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations	Neighbourhood and Enlargement	Social
Financial Stability, Financial Services, and Capital Markets Union	Financial Services, Financial Stability, and the Capital Markets Union	Economic
Health and Food Safety	Health and Food Safety	Social
Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management	Crisis Management	Social
Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship, and SMEs	Internal Market	Economic
International Cooperation and Development	International Partnerships	Social
Justice, Consumers, and Gender Equality	Justice	Social
Migration and Home Affairs	Home Affairs	Social
Regional Policy	Cohesion and Reforms	Economic

Research, Science, and Innovation	Innovation, Research, Culture, Education, and Youth	Economic
Trade	Trade	Economic
Transport and Space	Transport	Economic

Source: own elaboration.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research question guiding this study is: how does the nature of the portfolios held by European Commission officials affect the frequency and nature of their meetings with interest groups? This research question seeks to deepen the understanding of how the relationships between the European Commission and interest groups may be influenced by the nature of the officials' portfolios and the interests represented by these groups, thereby contributing to transparency and a better understanding of the decision-making processes within the European Union.

Two hypotheses are proposed. On the one hand, it is considered that there is a relationship between the affiliation of European Commission officials to economic portfolios and the frequency of their meetings with interest groups categorized in various areas of material interests, such as companies, trade associations, and business entities. At the same time, it is anticipated that officials responsible for portfolios related to social issues tend to hold more frequent meetings with interest groups focused on immaterial interests linked to unions, professional associations, non-governmental organizations, and think tanks, among others.

To conduct this study, an analytical-descriptive approach of a longitudinal nature is adopted, incorporating a quantitative content analysis aimed at comprehensively examining all recorded meetings from November 2014 to October 2023. This analysis encompasses two legislatures: the Juncker Commission, which extends from November 1, 2014, to November 30, 2019, and the Von der Leyen Commission, covering the period from December 1, 2019, to October 2023 (with only a few months remaining in the legislative term).

For data acquisition, two distinct sources were used. The first one is the European Commission's Transparency Register (European Transparency Register, 2023). One of the most significant issues with this transparency platform is the lack of centralization and unification of interest groups and their meetings with commissioners. It is essential to highlight that if interest groups do not renew their registration, they disappear from the registry, and the corresponding data for that group is no longer available (Bratu, 2021). In other words, only active interest groups are present in the Transparency Register. Therefore, to obtain information about both active and inactive interest groups, the Lobbycom Project (2023) was utilized, which records interest groups monthly. This project provides data on interest groups that were previously registered but currently do not appear on the Transparency Register page.

Once the historic list of unique interest groups is completed, the database from the European Commission (2023) is used, which aggregates the meetings held by the European Commission with interest groups over the last two legislatures. The interest groups are classified according

to their Identification Number (ID), which will be the variable used to cross-reference the two databases.

After constructing both databases, the meetings are classified according to the theoretically established criteria. Specifically, the portfolios of the commissioners are manually categorized into tangible or intangible, determining which portfolios fall under the economic domain and which pertain to the social domain. Similarly, the interest groups are classified as material or immaterial through the creation of dummy variables, based on the organizational interests of each group.

To investigate whether the hypothesis presented by the researchers are corroborated or refuted, descriptive statistics were conducted to visualize the distribution of the number of meetings by portfolio and organizational category. Additionally, an independence analysis was performed using the chi-square coefficient to determine whether there is a correlation between the portfolios of the commissions and the categories of the interest groups. The formula that describes the test of independence is:

$$X^2 = \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{(O_i - E_i \vee -0.5)^2}{E_i}$$

This formula allows for the calculation of the chi-square test statistic with Yates' continuity correction. In this context, the observed frequencies correspond to the actual counts present in the data, while the expected frequencies represent the counts that would be anticipated if no association existed between the variables under analysis. The formula computes the difference between the observed and expected frequencies, squares this difference, divides it by the expected frequency, and sums these values across all categories.

#### 4. RESULTS

To begin with the results, it is important to note that out of a total of 31,427 documented meetings between commissioners and various interest groups across the two legislative terms, in 24,587 of them the interest groups involved had been registered in the Transparency Register at some point. This leaves 6,840 meetings in which the identity of the interest group involved remains unclear and are therefore not included in the analysis.

When examining the pattern of meetings based on the portfolio's nature, within the economic portfolio, companies and groups, and trade and business associations represent the three main categories in terms of the number of meetings and percentages. This aligns with the expectation that officials with economic portfolios meet more frequently with interest groups that defend material interests (see table 3).

In the social portfolio (51.72%, n=12,716), although the number of meetings with the aforementioned categories is lower, the total number of meetings is slightly higher compared to the economic portfolio (48.28%, n=11,871). In this case, a greater diversity in the types of groups they engage with can be observed. For example, the categories of trade unions and professional associations, and professional consultancies show proportionally higher numbers. This suggests that those responsible for social portfolios are involved with a broader spectrum of issues.



It can be observed that companies and groups lead in numbers for both economic (18.47% of the total) and social portfolios (15.33% of the total), which may reflect the significant influence of businesses on European Union policy, regardless of the portfolio's nature. On the other hand, trade and business associations (16.89% Eco and 13.87% Soc, of the total) also hold a significant percentage, highlighting their important role in policy formation.

NGOs and similar organizations (6.08% Eco and 13.27% Soc, of the total) show a notable presence, indicating that civil interests and social concerns are also being considered in policy discussions, although their weight varies across portfolios, being much lower than companies and associations in the economic portfolio but with a similar percentage in the social portfolio.

Conversely, when considering the minority groups, both portfolios coincide in categories that represent less than 1% for each portfolio: academic institutions, associations and networks of public authorities, organizations in the religious sector, law firms, self-employed individuals, and entities, offices or networks by third countries.

At a mid-level, between 2-6% of both portfolios include the following categories: trade unions and professional associations (4.20% Eco – 5.46% Soc, of the total), professional consultancies (3.13% Eco – 2.48% Soc, of the total), think tanks and research institutions (3.07% Eco – 5.99% Soc, of the total), and other organizations, public or mixed entities (2.16% Eco – 2.42% Soc, of the total).

**Table 3. Absolute and proportional distribution of the number of meetings in the economic and social portfolios of the European Commission, depending on the nature of the interest groups**

Portfolios	Categories of interest groups	Meetings	Meetings per portfolio (%)	Meetings (%)
<b>Economic Portfolios</b>	Companies and groups	4,541	38.25	18.47
	Trade and business associations	4,153	34.98	16.89
	NGOs and similar organizations	1,496	12.60	6.08
	Trade unions and professional associations	498	4.20	2.03
	Professional consultancies	372	3.13	1.51
	Think tanks and research institutions	365	3.07	1.48
	Other organizations, public or mixed entities	256	2.16	1.04
	Associations and networks of public authorities	69	0.58	0.28
	Academic institutions	53	0.45	0.22
	Law firms	33	0.28	0.13
	Organizations in the religious sector	22	0.19	0.09
	Self-employed individuals	11	0.09	0.04
	Entities, offices or networks by third countries	2	0.02	0.01

<b>Social Portfolios</b>	Companies and groups	3,769	29.64	15.33
	Trade and business associations	3,410	26.82	13.87
	NGOs and similar organizations	3,263	25.66	13.27
	Trade unions and professional associations	694	5.46	2.82
	Professional consultancies	635	5.99	2.58
	Think tanks and research institutions	315	2.48	1.28
	Other organizations, public or mixed entities	308	2.42	1.25
	Associations and networks of public authorities	140	1.10	0.57
	Academic institutions	111	0.87	0.45
	Law firms	30	0.24	0.12
	Organizations in the religious sector	25	0.20	0.10
	Self-employed individuals	16	0.13	0.07
	Entities, offices or networks by third countries	0	0	0

Source: own elaboration.

Delving deeper into the analysis, it is observed that there are more meetings with material organizations than with immaterial ones across both types of portfolios. When examining the relationship between portfolios and the type of organization, it becomes evident that the economic portfolio has a significantly higher number of meetings with material organizations (n=9,599) compared to immaterial ones (n=2,272). This supports the hypothesis that officials in economic portfolios engage more frequently with interest groups focused on material interests.

Similarly, in the social portfolio, meetings with material-oriented organizations (n=8,213) also outnumber those with immaterial-oriented organizations (n=4,503). Therefore, the hypothesis regarding the relationship between social portfolios and interest groups with immaterial interests is disproved. However, the proportion of meetings with immaterial organizations is higher in the social portfolio than in the economic one.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of meetings between European Commission officials with economic and social portfolios and interest groups categorized as having material or immaterial interests. Overall, the figure reinforces the idea that European Commission officials tend to engage more frequently with economic interest groups, irrespective of the nature of the portfolio they represent.

**Table 4. Contingency between portfolios, based on their economic or social nature, and interest groups, based on their material or immaterial interests**

	<b>Economic Portfolio</b>	<b>Social Portfolio</b>
<b>Intangible organization</b>	2,272	9,599
<b>Material organization</b>	4,503	8,213

Source: own elaboration.

In the context of the previous results related to meetings between European Commission officials and interest groups, an independence test was applied to examine whether the nature of the commissioner's portfolio (economic or social) is associated with the interests of organization (material or immaterial) they meet with. The results of the chi-square test are as follows:

- chi-square test statistic = 813.62
- df = 1
- p-value = 2.2e-16

Given that the p-value is significantly lower than 0.05, it is evident that there is a lack of independence between the two variables in question, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis. This leads to the conclusion that, with a confidence level greater than 95%, there is evidence to support the dependence between the classification of the portfolios (economic or social) and the interests defended by the organizations (material or immaterial) with which the commissioners meet. In this case, the dependence arises from the fact that both types of portfolios tend to have a higher number of meetings with entities representing material interests.

In broader terms, this indicates that a commissioner with an economic portfolio is more likely to have meetings with material organizations, and those with social portfolios also exhibit a higher proportion of meetings with such organizations. This finding aligns with the observations from the previous analysis and reinforces the notion that the type of work a commissioner undertakes is more closely associated with material interests than with immaterial ones.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The study examines the relationship between the European Commission and interest groups, focusing on how the type of portfolios held by officials affects the frequency and nature of their meetings. The results indicate a correlation between these portfolios and interactions with interest groups. Specifically, officials, regardless of whether they are associated with economic or social portfolios, tend to meet with organizations representing material interests. This supports the first hypothesis, which linked economic portfolios to organizations with material interests, but refutes the second hypothesis that social portfolios were more likely to engage with organizations focused on immaterial interests.

In summary, commissioners with economic portfolios show a tendency to meet with entities that have tangible commercial and economic interests. In contrast, officials with social portfolios, while frequently interacting with immaterial groups such as those advocating for

social rights, public welfare, and environmental concerns, issues that often garner greater social acceptance and support (Turnbull-Dugarte et al., 2022; Walker, 2012), still tend to have a higher proportion of meetings with organizations representing tangible interests. The study provides evidence that the nature of the portfolios held by European Commission officials is associated with the types of interest groups they engage with, prioritizing material or economic portfolios over social or immaterial ones.

These patterns may reflect policy priorities and the influence of interest groups on them. According to Almansa-Martínez et al. (2022), De Bruycker and Colli (2023), and Woll (2019), economic capacity plays a crucial role in determining the ability of interest groups to take action, with companies being the key players in this regard. This observation suggests a significant influence of businesses on the political decisions of the European Union, regardless of the specific nature of the portfolios they manage. In contrast, when examining the representation of minority groups, it becomes apparent that they hold fewer meetings. This could indicate that these groups have limited influence in the decision-making process or that their interests are channeled through other mechanisms (Moreno-Cabanillas and Castillo-Esparcia, 2023).

The significance of these results lies in the fact that the influence of interest groups on decision-making is evident in the frequency of their meetings with commissioners, indicating a potential trend toward the promotion of economic interests within the policies of the European Commission. However, the importance of meetings with immaterial groups, particularly in the social sphere, highlights that social interests and public welfare are also being taken into account. This suggests an effort to incorporate a broader range of perspectives in policy formulation (Wirtz et al., 2019). Maintaining a balance between material and immaterial interests is necessary for ensuring transparency and equitable representation of diverse viewpoints in the political process (Bitonti, 2020), and this balance should be actively promoted in the future.

In this regard, the findings also have significant implications for understanding and improving transparency in the European Union. By identifying specific patterns in the meetings between commissioners and interest groups, the study emphasizes the need to ensure that the voices of all sectors are adequately represented. Recognizing the association between the portfolios of officials and the interest groups they meet with paves the way for more informed discussions on how to better balance interests in the policy formulation of the European Union.

One of the main limitations of the study is the incomplete coverage of the European Transparency Register. Not all interest groups are registered or keep their records updated in this registry, which may introduce bias into the analyzed data. This limits the ability to obtain a comprehensive and accurate view of the interactions between commissioners and interest groups. Additionally, the study's focus on the dichotomous grouping of portfolios (economic and social) and interest groups (material and immaterial) is another notable limitation. By relying solely on these simplified categories, the inherent complexity and diversity of the portfolios and responsibilities of commissioners may be overlooked. The intention of this research is to serve as a starting point for analyzing these relationships.

To address these limitations, future research could adopt a more detailed and nuanced classification system for both commissioners' portfolios and interest groups, moving beyond the simplified dichotomies of economic/social and material/immaterial. A sector-specific approach, categorizing portfolios and interest groups based on distinct fields such as technology, healthcare, energy, or environmental advocacy, could provide deeper insights into the unique dynamics within each domain. Furthermore, incorporating additional dimensions, such as the geographic focus or the scale of influence (local, national, or international), could capture the complexity of these interactions more effectively.

Efforts should also be directed at enhancing the completeness and reliability of the data. This could involve cross-referencing the European Transparency Register with alternative sources, such as national registries, academic studies, or publicly available disclosures, and conducting surveys or interviews with interest groups that remain unregistered. Expanding the analysis to include unregistered groups and their activities would reduce potential bias and provide a more comprehensive view of lobbying efforts. Finally, longitudinal studies could examine how these interactions evolve over time, shedding light on trends, shifts in priorities, and the long-term impacts of lobbying on policy-making processes.

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