

*Workshop 5: Putting EU civil society involvement under scrutiny*

*Panel: Civil Society Organisations in EU Governance: Lobby Groups like Any Other?*

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**Civil Society Organisations under the Impact of the European Commission's  
Consultation Regime**

**1. Civil society and civil society organisations: From myth to partner in governance**

Civil society ranks high in political discourse. It has become the epitome for political emancipation, and the strengthening of civil society is habitually considered as a means of securing political and social self-determination. The concept of civil society is loaded with positive normative connotations even though there is little agreement concerning the question what constitutes civil society. The role and functions attributed to civil society vary over time and across countries and often it is more a myth than a reality (Jobert/Kohler-Koch 2008). Despite all these dissimilarities, the discourse on civil society usually flares up in times of (perceived) legitimacy crisis and this is also how it came on stage in the European Union. The incantation of civil society was a response to the (alleged) democratic deficit of the Union and it was embedded in reflections on how to make EU governance both more democratically legitimate and efficient (Greenwood 2007; Michel 2008).

***The dual interest in civil society and civil society organisations***

In the EU context civil society has two images. Firstly, it is the emergent political community of the Union, an imaginary "European people" which constitutes the polity and simultaneously is the source of demands on and support to the political system of the EU. The European civil society is an attractive vision for European integrationists since it holds the promise to be the breeding ground for a European demos or at least to become its substitute. Civil society as such has no actor quality.<sup>1</sup> This comes with the second image, namely civil

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<sup>1</sup> Trez (2007: 17; 2005) proposes the notion of "civil society as a discursive formation within the public sphere".

society as *organised* civil society. Civil society organisations (CSO) form and transform civil society through discourse and interaction in the public sphere; they make civil society visible and give societal interests a voice. Organised civil society is said to compensate for the deficiencies of representative democracies by animating citizens' participation, by reaching out from the grassroots to far away Brussels and by bringing Europe closer to the people.

Organised civil society is also attractive as a partner in governance. It is expected to voice the diversity of interests and views and to bring the knowledge and down-to-earth experience of citizens into the policy-making process. Thus, civil society organisations are invited to give advice and to participate formally and actively in the collective decision-making process in order to improve the quality of EU governance.<sup>2</sup>

EU institutions, just as national and local governments, appreciate the contributions of civil society organisations to input and to output legitimacy. In recent years, they have been increasingly open to civil society actors and even more, they have taken an interest to activate political participation. "Participatory engineering" (Zittel 2008) ranges high on the Union's agenda. The obvious reason is that a European, trans-national civil society is still only far away on the horizon and the support of and collaboration with civil society associations is considered to have the potential to make it come true.

To put it in a nutshell: The European Union is interested in strengthening both, civil society and civil society associations. Civil society associations are important in themselves and because they have an instrumental value. They (partly) constitute the emergent European civil society and contribute to its on-going formation. They also provide input and output legitimacy by linking citizens to the public sphere and to government, either through exerting influence on government or by being a partner in governance. These multi-functional expectations concerning civil society are well documented in the statements of EU institutions – though mostly only implicitly and not in a systematic way.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Civil society organisations – extra-ordinary members in the family of interest groups?**

Can civil society organisations contribute to enhance EU democracy in such a multi-functional way and thus claim to have a privileged place in the EU system? We do not

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<sup>2</sup> Even when civil society is related to governance, the concept of civil society is used in different ways. Based on a comparative empirical analysis across policy sectors Carlo Ruzza can demonstrate that different actors use the concept for different purposes (Ruzza 2007).

<sup>3</sup> See above all the conclusions of the Presidency of the European Council, Turin 1996 in connection with the implementation of the Lisbon strategy 2000 and the White Paper on European Governance by the European Commission (2001). Furthermore, the EESC has been very dedicated to upgrade civil society; it organised several conferences with the participation of civil society (conferences in 1999, 2001 and 2004) and issued several opinions.

question good intentions and sincere efforts, but want to explore the effects of institutional constraints and political conditions. According to our hypothesis - which we will explicate in chapter 4 - civil society organisations will adapt their behaviour according to the ‘logic of influence’ and the ‘logic of membership’ like any other interest group.<sup>4</sup> But it is up to empirical research to test if this will change their characteristic features in a way which will hamper their capacity to contribute actively to EU democracy. Before we turn to our investigation and empirical findings, we have to lay out quite clearly what we consider to be the relevant characteristics of a civil society organisation.

### ***Defining civil society organisations: Differentiated images***

#### *CSO - in the perception of the European Commission*

In a first approach we may recall the definitions suggested by the European Commission (hereafter European Commission or Commission) and the Economic and Social Committee. Both started with an encompassing enumeration of non-state actors<sup>5</sup> which share some common features: They are *voluntary* associations, *independent*, i. e. not bound by instructions from outside bodies, and they are *not-for-profit*. Furthermore, civil society organisations are expected to *act in public*. When the Commission opened a (voluntary) online register for “European-level civil society organisations” it introduced the category of ‘non-governmental organisations’. NGOs were defined more narrowly; in addition to the criteria mentioned above, they were to serve the *public good*, be dedicated to the interests of a particular group of persons or of *society as such* and not to act in favour of the economic or professional interests of their members, i. e. *act in the interest of the ‘other’*.<sup>6</sup>

#### *CSO – self-perception*

This categorisation of NGOs comes close to the self-image of those organisations which have joined together in the Civil Society Contact Group. They characterise themselves as ‘rights

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<sup>4</sup> The concepts “logic of influence” and “logic of membership” respectively refer to the institutional structures and prevailing processes within the relevant political arena, to which organisations/associations need to adapt if they want to represent their members’ interests successfully (Traxler 1995), and the need for these organisations to respond to membership demand in order to avoid the loss of members and necessary resources (Waarden 1995).

<sup>5</sup> See the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on “The role and contribution of civil society organisations in the building of Europe” (Economic and Social Committee 1999: 30); it was intensely discussed in the Working Group 2a («CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY») preparing the Commission’s White Paper on Governance and then adopted: “Civil society includes the following: trade unions and employers’ organisations (“social partners”); nongovernmental organisations; professional associations; charities; grassroots organisations; organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life with a particular contribution from churches and religious communities.” (Commission 2001: 15)

<sup>6</sup> See the information on the CONECCS database, the voluntary listing of “European-level civil society organisations”, which was closed down in 2007.

and value based NGO'<sup>7</sup>, representing public interests. Their mission is to represent issues – whether environmental, social, developmental or humanitarian – and to represent segments of society who do not have a voice – e.g. victims of human rights abuses, people experiencing extreme poverty, or minorities who are not in a position to speak for themselves (Platform of European Social NGOs 2001).<sup>8</sup>

### *CSO - in the perception of the scientific community*

Drawing on the results of an online-survey conducted in the framework of DemoCiv<sup>9</sup> between 15.01.2008 and 15.02.2008, which was addressed to 160 experts in civil society research, we know that the scientific community disagrees about which associations to subsume under the label of CSO.

Survey participants were asked to check which of a list of around 40 EU-level associations “qualify as Civil Society Organisation (CSO)”.<sup>10</sup> Generally, and avoiding the term CSO as well as the term NGO in order to circumvent any mingling with existing and conflicting conceptions and connotations, we differentiated the associations listed in the survey into three groups<sup>11</sup>:

- Business Interest Associations (BIA),
- Unions and Professional Interest Associations (UPIA),
- General Interest Associations (GIA).

Among the 98 respondents the overwhelming majority (84,75 percent) qualify the associations we spotted as GIA as ‘CSO’. And those survey-participants, who did not classify them as CSO rather left the question open (don’t know: 11,51 percent); only 3,74 percent of the respondents excluded some of the GIA from the group of CSO.

The situation with Unions and Professional Interest Associations is quite different. The “survey community” is split with regard to whether UPIA can be considered as CSO or not. About half of the respondents (53,96 percent) claim that the listed UPIA qualify as CSO. The

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<sup>7</sup> See for example on the CSCG homepage: “The EU Civil Society Contact Group brings together eight large rights and value based NGO sectors - culture, environment, education, development, human rights, public health, social and women.” (<http://www.act4europe.org/code/en/default.asp>; 27.02.2008).

<sup>8</sup> Another telling document is the presentation of Beger 2004.

<sup>9</sup> ‘DemoCiv’ is an ongoing research project directed by Beate Kohler-Koch on “Democratic Legitimacy via Civil Society Involvement? The Role of the European Commission”.

<sup>10</sup> Originally 38 associations were listed, but for our analysis we decided to exclude the “Association of Natural Medicine in Europe (ANME)”. Due to its mixed member structure and the variety of interests combined - producers (companies), practitioners (medical doctors and homeopaths) as well as users (patients) – it is difficult to classify this association into one of our (analytical) groups (see below).

<sup>11</sup> In our questionnaire we listed the names of selected associations in a random order and without any further information.

remaining half is again divided: 28,83 percent of survey participants decided that the listed UPIA do not qualify as CSO, but also the group of the undecided is quite high (17,22 percent).

Finally, BIA have the lowest support for qualifying as CSO. 40,63 percent of the respondents excluded the listed BIA *expressis verbis* from CSO; only 37,01 percent of the respondents included BIA in the group of CSO. Evidently, most survey participants are of the opinion that BIA do not qualify as CSO. However, more than a fifth of survey participants were undecided: 22,36 percent declared not to know whether to qualify the listed BIA as CSO or not.

Variations certainly can be attributed to different concepts of ‘civil society’. How different concepts of civil society link to specific answering patterns regarding our list of associations remains to be analysed (our online-survey provides the necessary data).

### **3. Civil society organisations as promoter of EU democracy**

#### ***Relevant characteristics***

As definitions have to match the research question, we will highlight those characteristics of CSOs which – apart from the “ordinary” features of any non-state and non-profit actor - qualify civil society organisations as (potential) promoters of EU democracy:

1. They are firmly established in civil society (linking to citizens),
2. They represent general interests,
3. They give voice to weak interests.

These three features correspond with the expectation that their activities will

1. advance the formation of Europe’s civil society by setting off and feeding into the trans-national discourse,
2. counter the fragmentation and particularistic bias of policy making by bringing in cross-cutting issues and raising awareness for the public good,
3. uphold minority rights and promote solidarity.

Civil society organisations can only accomplish these tasks when they remain close to civil society. The key to success rests with intensive communication involving civil society. Communication ought to be in public, be not just top-down but also bottom-up, and be open to the broad diversity of views of a large sector of society (or society as such). Positions ought to be arrived at by rational communication and deliberations framed by universal rights and values and should always be open to revision. This implies a process of reiteration and,

consequently, a high level of extended and intense communication. It is plausible to assume that member based organisations will employ different ways and means of communication than organisations with a fluid constituency of supporters.

### ***Functional transformation through the backdoor***

The discursive potential of civil society organisations is constrained by resources, bounded by the institutional and social environment. When communicating, European civil society organisations have to fight with the well-known obstacles of multi-level systems, the distance to Brussels not just in geographic terms but also in terms of political culture, also including the varying duration of EU membership and consequently varying experiences within the EU, different cultures of associational life, the varying experience with interest representation itself depending on the age of the democratic system, language barriers, and nationally segmented public spheres. To make matters worse, civil society organisations may be trapped by the need to adapt to the ‘logic of influence’ prevailing in Brussels.

They have to get organised in a way to meet the functional requirements of ‘effective participation’. The moment civil society organisations enter the policy-making sphere they play the same role as any other interest group: Their task is to represent interests, to lobby decision makers in order to have an impact on outcome, to mobilize followers and the media to convince decision-makers that they have a case and the support of a wider public. The objective is effective participation, which serves two aims: The realization of preferred political ends and the long-term survival of the organisation. Only success averts the exit of members or supporters and the loss of resources.

However, organising effective participation may come at the prize of turning civil society organisations into a lobby group like any other, i.e. concentrating on particular interests and being – at best – a transmission-belt, instead of providing a space for reasoning and deliberation. The dangers are twofold: Efficiency calls for *elitism* and effectiveness suggests *specificity*. For the sake of efficiency positions will be defined in the inner circles of Brussels. Efficiency is a matter of timing, of commanding knowledge and resources.

Our **hypothesis** is that organisational characteristics channel the propensity either to concentrate communication at Brussels, or to extend it to the wider sphere of European civil society. Effectiveness in terms of impact on outcome is constraint by the structural characteristics of the decision-making process, the choice of issues and by power constellations. All these conditions feed back into the strategies of actors involved. Civil society organisations - like any other interest group - will see to it that they increase their

bargaining power, last not least by forming alliances. In other words: The conditions for effective participation channel options of organisation.

To sum up: We are interested in the democratic added value which civil society organisations can bring to the EU and we propose that the democratic added value depends on the communicative capacity of such organisations. Before we explore the communicative behaviour of civil society organisations and how it resonates in the public (which is another part of the DemoCiv project) we want to check in a systematic way the conditions and constraints under which civil society organisations operate. The hypothesis, enlightened by organisational theory, is that distinct organisational features make a difference.

### ***Constraining factors***

There always exists a tense relationship between horizontal and vertical communication. Resources and, as mentioned above, the characteristics of the institutional system of the EU and of the membership and/or constituency of the European general interest associations (EGIA) are obviously constraining factors. Policies may also make a difference. In addition, communication behaviour is always influenced by the identity and role perceptions of actors involved and these, in turn, are dependent on the organisational context. From the perspective of organisation theory four characteristics have to be taken as key factors: Organisational structure, organisational demography, organisational locus, and institutionalisation (Egeberg 2005: 5).<sup>12</sup>

The ***organisational structure*** of an organisation (be it an association or a network) settles the *status* of its components; the organisational structure embodies *regimes* defining appropriate role behaviour, principles of *specialisation* of tasks, and the *allocation of resources*. The *regime* contains principles, norms, rules and procedures that impose “codified expectations as regards the decision behaviour of the various role incumbents. The logic of appropriateness, incentives and bounded rationality are the mechanisms that are supposed to connect role expectations and actual behaviour” (Egeberg 2005: 5). Such regimes are often formalised in statutes and internal proceedings but mostly they are informal, emerge from routines, and reflect what is considered to be appropriate in the respective environment. The degree of *specialisation* within an association mainly comes with size. Specialisation diverts attention from the whole to the parts, and depending on the degree and the mode of coordination (negative or positive coordination) the loyalty of actors will be with their own portfolio.

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<sup>12</sup> We use here the model applied by Morten Egeberg (2005/2006) for his analysis of the college of European Commissioners.

Specialisation may be organised in different ways dividing tasks according to either functional or territorial aspects. As a consequence divergent types of interest – either originating from functional sectors or from national or regional origin - may become represented more prominently. The allocation of *resources* within an organisation determines career patterns (permanent or temporary employment; part-time or full employment; flat or steep hierarchy; patterns of recruitment, etc.) and thus influences inward or outward looking behaviour.

**‘Organisational demography’** is distinguished by the usual characteristics of social differentiation such as gender, age, education, nationality. More relevant in our context are the background and career prospects of the members of the organisation. Especially when employment is short and/or part-time, it makes a difference where a person is coming from and where she or he is likely to have a new appointment.

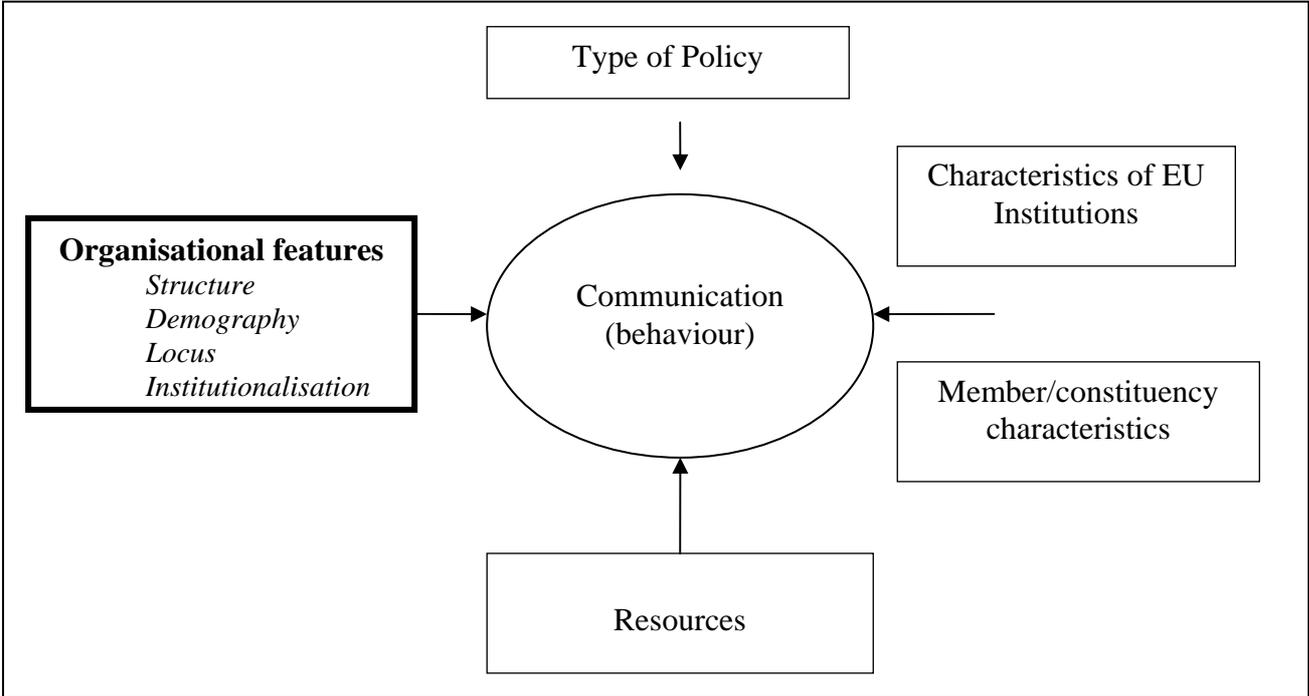
The physical location, that is the **‘organisational locus’** is important for both, internal and external communication. It has an impact on the easiness of establishing personal contacts and thus influences contact patterns and consequently coordination behaviour. “The number of unplanned meetings among decision-makers is particularly sensitive to how the physical setting is arranged. Thus, for example, the amount of attention leaders pay to the concerns of their respective portfolios versus the organisation as a whole may be partly affected by whether they are located on the premises of their departments or situated together as a leadership group.” (Egeberg 2005: 6-7)

The ***institutionalisation*** of an organisation is not completed with its establishment but will grow over time, mainly by adding informal norms and practices. These may support or challenge the original objective of a given organisation. Mostly, the growing complexity and consolidation of informal norms and practices promotes a process of “autonomisation”, that is “an organisation’s transition from being a pure instrument for somebody else to becoming a principal in itself” (Egeberg 2005: 7). Permanent instead of delegated and revolving personnel is reinforcing such a trend.

The type of policy may accentuate organisational factors in one way or another. If items on the agenda are more specific than cross-cutting, they may accentuate the portfolio orientation within an organisation. Regulatory policies are more likely to support the functional specialisation whereas distributive and re-distributive policies often have a territorial impact and consequently favour giving attention to national interests. Furthermore, particular salient

and controversial issues may call for communicating with the membership/constituency and thus underscore the issue of representation.

**Figure 1: Concept of Analysis**



The pertinent question now is: **In which way does the variation in organisational characteristics impact on the communicative behaviour of civil society organisations?** When will an organisation tend to become more *elitist* and more *specific* in its orientation? In our empirical research we have been guided by the following hypotheses:

1. Civil society networks (*organisational structure, status of components*) will mainly rest on an informal *regime* so that expectations in role behaviour are unsettled and demand greater investments in communication. Job hopping between EU level associations (*organisational demography*), sharing buildings or even offices (*organisational locus*) and sitting in the same EU advisory committees may compensate for the distance that come from the autonomy of the network’s members.
2. Functional *specialisation* ordinarily puts a high premium on expert knowledge, whereas territorial specialisation gives impetus to pay more attention to members and constituencies. From this perspective it is plausible to assume that functional specialisation goes together with a tendency to concentrate communication in the centre whereas territorial specialisation gives prominence to the periphery<sup>13</sup>. In the

<sup>13</sup> A contrasting hypothesis would claim that many times the local associations have the specific expertise and, therefore, sectoral specialisations also demands intensive vertical communication. In this case, however, the

case of EU level networks and associations which are composed of a multi-layered system of organisations, the ‘periphery’ may be distant and difficult to reach. Particularly in this case the *regime* properties make a difference: Formal and informal norms, rules and procedures may ease efficient and effective communication and thus induce the Brussels association to pay more attention to vertical communication.

3. Career patterns (*organisational demography*) reflect the dynamic growth of the civil society sector. Most of the networks and even of the EGIA are only of recent origin. Role perception, and consequently communicative behaviour, will be different depending on the personal background and future prospects of a person. If those who have responsibility at the EU level are coming from the Brussels circuit and expect to be part of it also in the future, their focus will be different from those who came in as officials or volunteers from grassroots associations with the perspective to return. Variables of the *organisational structure* such as the type of employment and patterns of recruitment are decisive: Volunteers, delegated personnel, part-time and temporary employees will hardly ever identify as much with the centre as a permanent full-time staff. Consequently their background has to be explored.
4. The *organisational locus* is important for contact patterns within the organisation but also extending beyond to the periphery of an organisation. EU associations have member associations at the national and sub-national (regional and sometimes local) level. Even in times of e-communication their geographical distance makes a difference. Still more important is that associations located in Brussels are ‘where the action is’. They have the advantage of immediate access and are on stage when crucial events take place. The flip side of the coin is that they may become entrenched in a policy-making process which they cannot control but which absorbs all their attention capacities.
5. *Institutionalisation* is not just a matter of time but also of context conditions which might make consolidation easier or more difficult. European civil society networks, umbrella associations and individual associations are not only of rather recent origin, they also have developed in parallel. This makes for a fluid situation and attracts attention of the associations’ personnel to what happens in Brussels. Therefore, the degree of ‘autonomisation’ may not be highly advanced but nevertheless the tendency to focus on the EU level may be greater than expected.

#### **4. Acting in Europe: Civil society organisations in the Brussels ambit**

Underlining that our analysis focuses only on matters of organisation and procedures, not content, the Civil Society Contact Group (CSCG) offers an ideal case for the analysis of the way the variation in organisational characteristics impact on the communicative behaviour of civil society organisations. The name already indicates that the CSCG claims to represent European Civil Society and a look at its members makes clear that it brings together a wide variety of interests (see Table 1): “The EU Civil Society Contact Group brings together eight large rights and value based NGO sectors - culture, environment, education, development, human rights, public health, social and women.” (Homepage of the CSCG; 22.2.2008)<sup>14</sup>. Thus we think that we are on the safe side when we choose the CSCG and its members, and further on its members’ members as research objects (see Table 1). Nevertheless, as we proceed we will always check if the associations in question qualify as European General Interest Associations (GIA) or rather belong to the category of business (EIA) or of trade unions/professionals (UPIA).

**Table 1: The family of the CSCG direct and indirect members**

| <b>First organisational level</b> | <b>Second organisational level</b>                                   | <b>Third organisational level</b> | <b>Forth organisational level</b> | <b>Etc.</b> |
|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| CSCG                              | Social Platform  | 33                                | 1253                              |             |
|                                   | The European Forum of the Arts and Heritage (EFAH)                   | 83                                | <i>Data to be confirmed</i>       |             |
|                                   | European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)                               | 47                                | 1037                              |             |
|                                   | Human Rights Development Network (HRDN)                              | 38                                | 276                               |             |
|                                   | The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) | 6                                 | 273                               |             |
|                                   | The European NGO confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD)  | 42                                | 221                               |             |
|                                   | The European Women’s Lobby (EWL)                                     | 48                                | 407                               |             |
|                                   | Green10  | 10                                | 282                               |             |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>8</b>   | <b>307</b>                        | <b>&gt; 3744</b>                  |             |

<sup>14</sup> The ETUC, representing European Union workers is not a member but an observer to the group. See <http://www.act4europe.org/code/en/civi.asp?Page=2&menuPage=2; 22.2.2008>.

For the analysis of the way the variation in organisational characteristics impact on the communicative behaviour of EU-level civil society organisations, we will concentrate on general and EU level interest associations, the ‘EGIA’ (European General Interest Associations) which belong to the first, second, and third organisational level of the CSCG, except when indicated otherwise. Among the listed 134 EU-level associations of the first to third organisational level of the CSCG, the largest group (87,41 %) belongs to the category of GIA; only a minority can be classified as BIA (8,15 %) and an even smaller group as UPIA (4,44 %).

### Institutionalisation

Looking at the age of EGIA, we can distinguish three groups (see Figure 2). For a long time, EGIA have just emerged sporadically; only when the Commission became more persistent in pursuing the Social Dialogue and started to promote the principle of ‘partnership’ in EU policies in the mid-1980s, the European associational landscape changed.<sup>15</sup> Another wave of setting up EGIA is related to the failure of the Maastricht Referendum in Denmark, which induced the Commission not to focus any longer exclusively on the factual quality of its policy proposals but to become concerned with a broader public acceptance of EU politics in the member states. This concern was reflected by the opening of the dialogue for general interest representatives and the implementation of funding programmes for GIA. A third wave of EGIA formation is linked to the introduction of a ‘Civil Dialogue’ in the field of employment and social affairs in 1996. Further, in order to establish representative partners for consultation and to advance transparency, the Commission encouraged networking amongst GIA and supported the establishment of forums and networks (see Finke/Jung/Kohler-Koch 2003 and Smismans 2003).

While these waves have increased the number of EGIA, it is also clear that most EGIA are still very young organisations. Only half of the EGIA (more associations than networks) were established before 1991 and about a third of the EGIA (36,63 %) only exist for the last decade or only for a few years.<sup>16</sup> Ten years are a short time for organisations to develop informal norms and practices, especially if uncertainty about financial resources – resulting from strong dependency on public sector funding (Fazi/Smith 2006) - does not allow for long-time

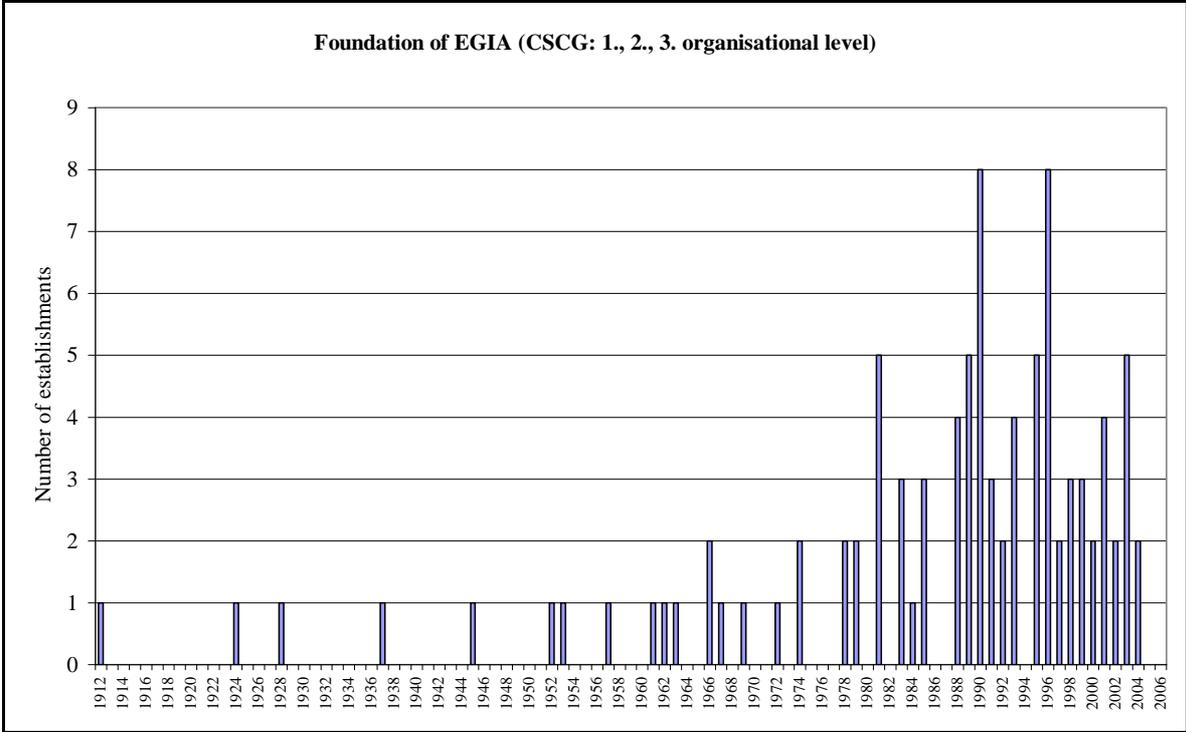
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<sup>15</sup> The idea to establish a dialogue with the European social partners was vitalized by the Delors Commission in 1985, when it organised the ‘Val Duchesse Meeting’ with European social partners to discuss the social dimension of the internal market. One of the results was an official mandate to develop and institutionalize a European Social Dialogue, which was included in the Single European Act in 1987 and officially introduced in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Quittkat/Finke 2008, Finke/Jung/Kohler-Koch 2003).

<sup>16</sup> For instance, out of the ten member associations of the Green10, the umbrella association for environmental GIA, 3 were created in 1991 or later.

planning and puts pressure on staff to concentrate on fund raising and the securing of their own jobs, deviating considerable time and resources from the substantial work and issues of the EGIA.

**Figure 2: The age of EGIA (CSCG: First, second, and third organisational level)**



Organisational structure

The following empirical analysis is mainly based on two tables (Table 2 and Table 3 below) and offers insights regarding

- functional and territorial specialisation, and
- the length of membership-chains between the CSCG and grassroots members or constituencies.

*Functional and territorial specialisation*

Looking at the organisational structure of the CSCG with regard to functional and territorial specialisation, we are confronted with a data situation of extreme complexity. The CSCG itself has eight EGIA members, all of which have a network structure, specialising in one of the above mentioned sectors culture, environment, education, development, human rights, public health, social and women. This specialisation is well reflected in the name of each network:

- *Social Platform*,
- European Forum of the *Arts and Heritage* (EFAH),
- European *Public Health* Alliance (EPHA),
- *Human Rights* Development Network (HRDN),
- The European Civil Society Platform on *Lifelong Learning* (EUCIS-LLL),
- The European NGO confederation for *Relief and Development* (CONCORD),
- The European *Women's* Lobby (EWL), Green 10.

When stepping down the levels organisation, the functional specialisation becomes even more pronounced. For the sake of demonstration we present data on the Green 10 and from two of its members, namely 'Friends of the Earth Europe' (FoEE) and 'Climate Action Network Europe' (CAN-E). For both EU-level organisations we present the array of organisations which pertain to just one of its national members (Germany). Both tables illustrate the sheer size and the complexity of the European associational life. Furthermore, we can see that the aggregation of specialisation does not follow a linear pattern.

When scrutinizing the membership at the third organisational level, we find that the networks share some members. Thus, the functional specialisation of the eight networks organised at the second organisational level is not sustained at lower levels; a number of EGIA at the third organisational level cover a wider – or at least a different range of specialisations. This pattern of overlapping and crosscutting is even more pronounced at the following organisational levels and it increases with the number of GIA involved.

With regard to the principle of specialisation, the member organisations of the Green 10 at first sight look as if they follow the principle of functional specialisation. However, when comparing Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE) and the Climate Action Network Europe (CAN-E) we find two very different organisational formations.

**Table 2: Example CSCG - Green 10 - Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE)**

| First organisational level | Second organisational level  | Third organisational level  | Fourth organisational level   | Fifth organisational level   | Sixth organisational level   | Seventh organisational level   | Eighth ..... |
|----------------------------|--|---|---|--|--|--|--------------|
| <b>CSCG</b><br>(8 members) | <b>Green10</b><br><br>Members:<br>Birdlife International<br><b>Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE)</b><br>CEE Bankwatch Network<br><b>Climate Action Network Europe (CAN-E)</b><br>European Environment Bureau (EEB)<br>European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E)<br>Health and Environment Alliance ( <b>HEAL</b> ) (formerly EPHA Environment Network (EEN))<br>Greenpeace<br>International Friends of Nature (IFN)<br>WWF European Policy Office (WWF-EPO) | <b>Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE)</b><br>(30 members, one by country) | <b>Germany:</b><br><u>BUND/FoE</u><br><u>Germany</u>                          | <b>Germany:</b><br>BUND/FoE Germany was founded in 1975 as a federation of pre-existing regional groups, reflecting the German federal structure. <b>16 regional branches</b><br><br>- <b>12 regional associations</b> | <b>BUND Baden-Württemberg</b><br><br><b>(Regionalverbände) in Baden-Württemberg</b> (with full-time employees):<br>- Heilbronn<br>- Stuttgart<br>- Heidelberg<br>- Karlsruhe<br>etc. | <b>300 city groups (Ortsgruppen) und administrative district/county groups (Kreisgruppen):</b><br>- BUND Mannheim (Kreisgeschäftsstelle)<br>- BUND Heidelberg (Kreisgeschäftsstelle)*<br>- BUND Heidelberg (Ortsgeschäftsstelle)*<br>- etc.<br><br>At this level, individual citizens participate.<br><br>*Different offices at different parts of the city. |              |
|                            |  |   | <b>France:</b><br>Friends of the Earth France/<br><u>Les Amis de la Terre</u> | <b>France:</b><br>FoEF, created in 1970, it is a grassroots organization with about 1500 individual members organised into <b>21 territorial groups</b> (3 regional, 11 departmental, 7 local groups).                 |  |  |              |
|                            |  |   |   |  |  |  |              |

**Table 3: Example CSCG - Green 10 - CAN-E**

| First organisational level   | Second organisational level          | Third organisational level   | Forth organisational level   | Fifth organisational level  | Sixth...                    |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|-----------------------------|
| <p align="center"><b>CSCG</b><br/>(8 members)</p>  | <p align="center"><b>Green10</b></p> | <p align="center"><b>Climate Action Network Europe (CAN-E)</b><br/>(98 full members from 24 countries, 12 observer members from 4 countries)</p> | <p align="center"><b>Germany:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung</li> <li>- Women in Europe for a Common Future</li> <li>- Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland – BUND/FoE Germany</li> </ul>  | <p align="center"><b>Germany</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- OTTER-ZENTRUM</li> <li>- Aktionsgemeinschaft Artenschutz e. V.</li> <li>- Arbeitsgemeinschaft kontrolliert deklarierte Rohstoffe</li> <li>- Bayerische Botanische Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der heimischen Flora</li> <li>- Berliner Artenschutz Team (BAT)</li> <li>- Bioland, Verband für organisch-biologischen Landbau e. V.</li> <li>- Bund Deutscher Landschafts-Architekten</li> <li>- Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland – BUND/FoE Germany</li> <li>- Bund gegen den Mißbrauch der Tiere</li> <li>- Demeter</li> <li>- Deutscher Alpenverein e. V. , (DAV)</li> <li>- Deutscher Schlittenhundesport-Verband e. V., (DSSV)</li> <li>- Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege e. V.</li> <li>- Germanwatch</li> <li>- Gesellschaft Deutscher Tierfotografen e.V.</li> <li>- Green Cross Deutschland e. V.</li> <li>- Global Nature Fund, (GNF)</li> <li>- Verband Deutscher Sporttaucher e. V.</li> <li>- Zukunfts-Zentrum Barsinghausen</li> </ul> |                             |
|  |                                      |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Deutscher Naturschutzring (DNR)/ German League for Nature and Environment (100 members)</b></li> </ul>   |   | <p align="center">.....</p> |
|  |                                      |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Germanwatch</li> <li>- Klima - Bündnis</li> <li>- LIFE - Frauen entwickeln Ökotechnik</li> <li>- Naturschutzbund – NABU (Birdlife)</li> <li>- WWF Deutschland</li> <li>- Weltwirtschaft, Ökologie and Entwicklung e.V.</li> <li>- Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst e.V.</li> <li>-</li> </ul> |   |                             |
| <p align="center"><b>France:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Helio International</li> <li>- Réseau Action Climat France</li> <li>- Association 4D</li> <li>- Association Détente</li> <li>- Agir pour l'Environnement</li> <li>- France Nature Environnement - FNE</li> <li>- <b>Les Amis de la Terre – AT France</b></li> <li>- Fédération Nationale des Associations d'Usagers des Transports (FNAUT)</li> <li>- Greenpeace France</li> <li>- WWF FRANCE</li> <li>- Comité de Liaison Énergies Renouvelables (CLER)</li> <li>- HESPUL</li> <li>- Energies et territoires</li> <li>- Réseau “sortir du Nucléaire”</li> </ul> |                                      |  |  |   |                             |

*Friends of the Earth Europe* (FoEE) (see Table 2) is a more or less classical “association-association”<sup>17</sup>, characterised by territorial specialisation: FoEE organises 30 national association-associations and has only one single member by country. At the national level (fifth organisational level of the CSCG-network) we find variations in the number of sub-national or local member associations, depending on the territorial structure of the country. In Germany, the *Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland* (BUND, Friends of the Earth Germany) was founded in 1975 as a federation of pre-existing sub-national groups; its 16 *Länder* branches reflect the German federal structure and territorial specialisation goes even two levels further: Only at the seventh organisational level individual citizens are members in local groups. Similarly, in France we find sub-national member organisations of the national umbrella association Friends of the Earth France (FoEF, *Les Amis de la Terre France*) which defines itself as a grassroots organisation. FoEF is organised in 21 territorial groups (3 regional, 11 departmental, 7 local groups). No further territorial specialisation can be found; i.e. in France individual citizens are members of and participate in these various territorial groups, which thus represent the sixth organisational level.

The organisational structure of the *Climate Action Network Europe* (CAN-E) is quite different (see Table 3). As its name indicates CAN-E is a network of functional specialisation. It has 98 full members from 24 countries with a very uneven distribution of members between countries. We find seven full members from Belgium and seven from the Netherlands, 11 from Germany, 14 full members from France, and 17 from UK, whereas from other countries we find fewer or even only one full member (for example Armenia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovenia, etc.). Looking - as an explorative example - at the German and French CAN-E members, at the fourth organisational level we mainly find GIA with a rather broad environmental agenda (see Table 3). On the fourth organisational level some members are organised on the basis of territorial specialisation as the already above mentioned Friends of the Earth Germany and Friends of the Earth France. But others have rather functionally specialised members, as in the case of the German umbrella organisation of German conservation and environmental protection organisations, the German League for Nature and Environment (Deutscher Naturschutzring (DNR)). The DNR organises one hundred GIA from various territorial levels (national, sub-national, local) and with varying degrees of functional specialisation, ranging from GIA with broad aims like “Protection of the Environment” or “Animal Welfare” to GIA with a very specialised agenda like the GIA “Otter Centre”, “Consumer Initiative”, “Initiative against Bird Murder”, etc..

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<sup>17</sup> “Association-associations” are associations which exclusively organise associations.

Although these data only offer a very rough picture and more data are needed, it is clear that in the sector of environment functional specialisation is a dominant feature. Interestingly enough, we do not find functional specialisation to be clearly either funnel-shaped or pyramidal. Rather, in networks both forms can appear simultaneously at the same organisational level.

### *Membership-chains*

Though the empirical data presented so far only provide some illustrative evidence, we obtain telling insights with respect to the “membership-chain”: several organisational levels have to be bridged in the endeavour to span communication from Brussels to the grass roots and vice versa. Furthermore, we find several types of organisational nestling (see Table 2, Table 3, and Figure 3).

In some instances, we find extreme long “membership-chains”, which span over up to nine organisational levels from the CSCG to the individual citizen or national/sub-national/local constituency (see Figure 3). It seems as “membership chains” become longer the higher the number of networks (in opposition to association-associations) integrated at the EU-level.<sup>18</sup>

We also find some European as well as national (umbrella) GIA being represented at several levels in the CSCG “membership-chain”. Yet, we need to differentiate between networks and associations. In the case of *networks*, especially at the EU level, we certainly find extreme organisational nestling. One striking example is SOLIDAR: Not only is SOLIDAR present at the third organisational level as well as at the fifth organisational level, but at the fifth organisational level SOLIDAR is a member of its own member, namely the International Federation of Workers’ Education Association (IFWEA). The same constellation holds true for the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) (see Figure 3), which is a fourth organisational level member of the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL). One of the members of PAN is the Women in Europe for a Common Future (fifth organisational level), but in turn PAN is again a member of the network Women in Europe for a Common Future (sixth organisational level). What this implies in terms of communication patterns has to be substantiated by further empirical research.

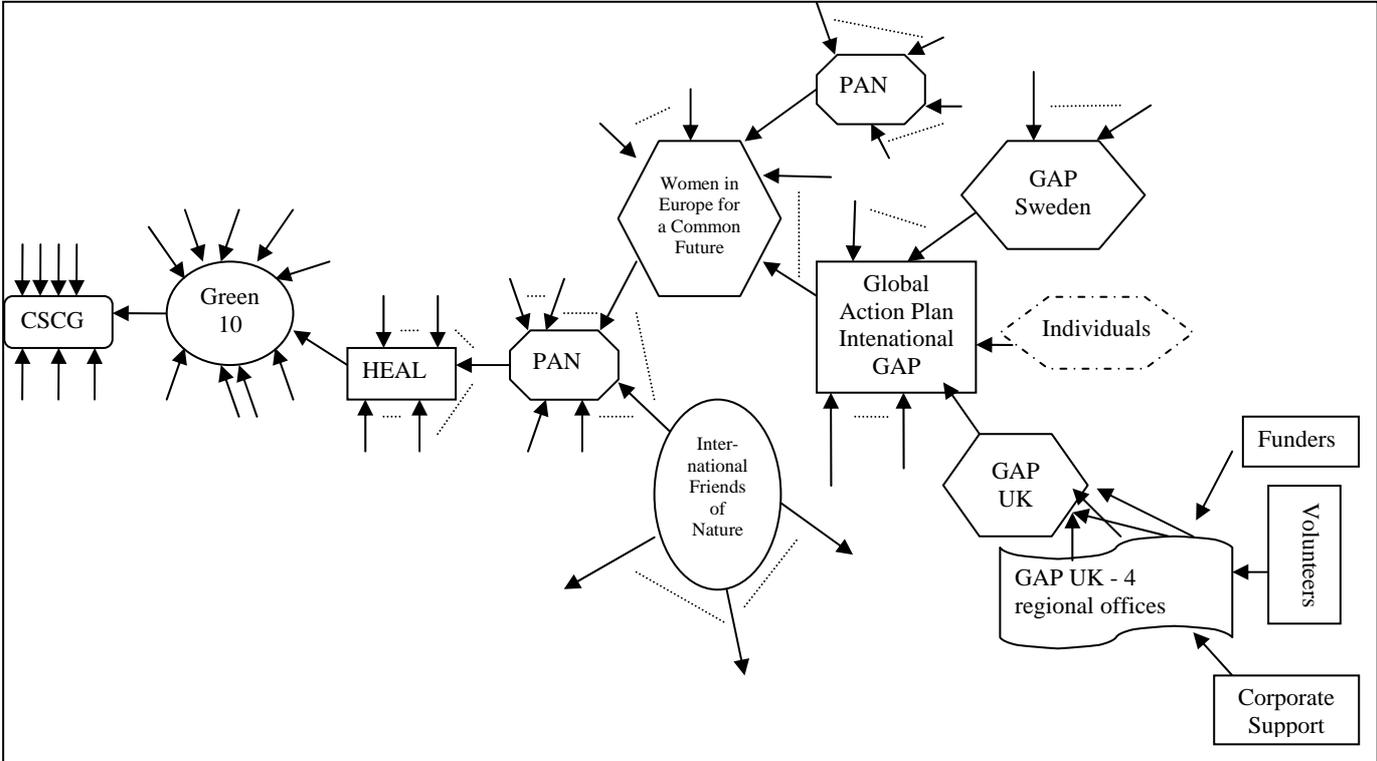
From a theoretical point of view we should not be surprised that the division of labour within networks is not following straight specific functional logics. Networks are characterised by heterarchy and members enjoy a high degree of autonomy. However, the type and degree of organisational nestling vary, and these variations matter. When we want to assess

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<sup>18</sup> The same cause-effect relationship also holds true for national level networks.

communication patterns between centre and periphery it is important to know the number of information and communication brokers and transmitters involved.

**Figure 3: From centre to periphery**



\* Dotted lines indicate further members.

Differently to networks, *association* have a hierarchical structure, irrespective whether structured on the principle of territorial or functional specialisation, and, therefore, hardly ever include members across levels of membership. But an association can of course be a member in several networks at various organisational levels depending on the functional or territorial specialisation.

Multiple memberships, especially when organisations are represented by the same persons, may support communication. Yet, multiple memberships may also render communication structures opaque and extremely complex. As a result, resources and attention may be deviated from vertical communication with the individual members or constituency to communication at the horizontal level. When considering the large number of organisations and the heterogeneity among member state level GIA with their different national backgrounds (political culture, duration of EU membership, experience with democracy, etc.), it is obvious that bottom-up as well as bottom-down processes of communication via the organisational membership-chain are not easy – maybe even impossible - to achieve.

### Organisational demography

The data collection on organisational demography is still very preliminary. Even when concentrating just on the CSCG and its eight members, information is very difficult to access via internet. The relevant data is fragmented, out-dated, or simply not available.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, we cannot offer an analysis. Nevertheless, we want to tell our tentative conclusions in order to receive some feedback.

From the data we managed to find (Table 4) we can see that our nine EGIA can be split into three groups: (I) HRDN and GREEN10 seem to fully rely on their members' personnel, (II) EFAH, EPHA, EUCIS-LLL, and the CSCG<sup>20</sup> only have a very limited number of own staff, (III) Social Platform, CONCORD and EWL employ a medium size staff when compared to other EU level associations (6 to 10 people).

**Table 4: The staff of the CSCG and its direct members<sup>21</sup>**

|  | CSCG  | Social Platform  | EFAH     | EPHA  | HRDN     | EUCIS-LLL | CONCORD   | EWL       | GREEN10  |
|--|---|--|----------|---|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| <b>Permanent/<br/>Temporary</b><br>No information on this distinction available. | (1)<br>(In the past there were temporary assistants.) | <b>6</b><br><i>In addition</i><br>Regula Heggli is mentioned as a member of staff in the function of "CSCG coordinator". | <b>3</b> | <b>3</b>  | <b>0</b> | <b>2</b>  | <b>10</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>0</b> |
| <b>Full-time/part-time</b><br>No information on this distinction available.      |   |  |          |   |          |           |           |           |          |
| <b>Volunteers/interns</b>  | <b>0</b>  | <b>?</b>   | <b>?</b> | <b>1</b><br>(In 2006 there were 6 interns and 1 volunteer.) | <b>0</b> | <b>?</b>  | <b>?</b>  | <b>1</b>  | <b>0</b> |

The size of staff is important for the capacity of a network or association to communicate. But also the career patterns may support easy communication. When the staff of a EU associations is changing jobs within the CSCG-network, private networks at EU level may emerge. Anyway, the communication pattern will be different than in a case where job rotation between member state associations and EU associations dominate. From the limited data

<sup>19</sup> In a next step we will to check the Activity Reports of EGIA. Although by definition always slightly out-dated we expect to obtain more information and comparable data. An example of a very extensive report is offered by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB); unfortunately the latest report (from February 2008) reports on the activities of 2005.

<sup>20</sup> We still have to check whether the CSCG coordinator is on the pay role of the Social Platform; in this case we have to add the CSCG to the group of those relying on their members' personnel.

<sup>21</sup> Data collection in January 2008.

available to us (eight CV of some current and former members of the CSCG board and CSCG coordinators), we find the following:

- From our eight CV only three show experience at the “grassroots level”.
- Five of the eight CV give evidence of EGIA careers, i.e. professionals changing their employer within the “organisational world” of the CSCG.
- Two CV give evidence for personal experiences within the European Commission or the European Parliament.

To put it short: The dominant picture is that of “EU-level lobbying professionals”.

### Organisational locus

Although data collection is not completed, we know that not only the eight direct members of the CSCG have their offices in the same area in Brussels, closely located to the European Commission, but also many EGIA of the third organisational level are closely located to the “power centre”. The Social Platform hosts the CSCG in its building and regular, so that we can assume regular informal contacts. This also applies to the sector specific networks and associations. First, random samples show that a number of third level EGIA share the office of “their” second level EGIA. Thus it is plausible to assume that proximity works in favour of unplanned and informal meetings that as a result EGIA staff members know each other well and are well aware of their respective portfolios.

## **5. Conclusions**

From the available, though limited, data we conclude that a tense relationship between horizontal and vertical communication may be expected in the “world of the CSCG”. Taking in consideration the long membership-chains that connect the CSCG or rather its eight member networks with member organisations and constituencies at the grass roots level, communication that makes for democratic deliberation will be rather the exception than the rule.

Concentrating attention to communication at the centre is also fostered by the recruitment strategies of EGIA. Only few representatives of EGIA seem to have grassroots experiences relevant enough to be mentioned in the CV. Most EGIA staff members have the profile of classical “professional lobbyists” and the feature of “job hopping” between EGIA is not unknown in the circles of EGIA. The rather young age of a third of the EGIA, limited and unsecured funds and the resulting fluidity of the job market certainly is one relevant reason for staff rotation.

Concentrating attention on the Commission and other interest group actors is also supported by the close location of EGIA offices in the same town district of Brussels. Unplanned and informal meetings are common, EGIA are well aware of their respective portfolios and EGIA staff members know each other well. This certainly has an advantage for horizontal communication and cooperation between EGIA, but it is a mixed blessing because it leads to “closed circles” and thus again detracts from vertical communication. Such a tendency may be supported by multiple memberships not just at the organisational level – an association being member in several other associations or networks – but also at the personal level – the same person acting as representative not just of one but two or even several associations.

Thus, summarising our results, there obviously exists a tendency to concentrate communication in the centre rather than to give prominence to the “periphery”, i.e. the constituencies or grassroots members. This might explain why “grassroots actors tend to trust European institutions but not their own European delegates”, as the data from the CIVGOV<sup>22</sup> project shows (Trenz 2007: 12). From our results it is not surprising that grassroots actors “express mistrust to internal procedures of representation and describe delegation within civil society as elitist and undemocratic. Especially local grassroots discard the representativeness of European umbrellas and of the kind of civil society organisations engineered by governments” (Trenz 2007: 12). Yet, the problem specification alone will not suffice to induce change or counter-balance the lopsidedness of EGIA communication.

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<sup>22</sup> The project acronym stands for “Organised Civil Society and European Governance”. Funding was granted within the Fifth Framework Programme (IHP-KAI-2001-1), coordinated by Carlo Ruzza, University of Trento.

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