

EU membership effect on interest group access to the European Commission

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Abstract

Interest groups constitute one of many components in the European Union, which constitutes a multi-level, multi-arena political system. A key element in the efforts of interest groups seeking influence is to gain access to the relevant institutions. As a provider of political premises, the European Commission (EC) is identified in interest group literature as an attractive target of interest groups in attempts to influence legislative processes.

The EU being one of the largest economies in the world, its openness to stakeholders also attracts interest from beyond the borders of the Union. Existing empirical works in the field of outside access is scarce, leaving behind a gap in the literature particularly evident for the case of EU membership as a possible explanatory factor for access. As a wide-ranging concept, access is measured on the basis of interest group meetings with the EC.

Taking advantage of openly available data in the Transparency Register on individual interest group specificities in combination with the EC meeting data enabled the construction of a data set, consisting of 6,512 observed interest groups. By use of plots and negative binomial regression, analyses were conducted on the effect of membership on interest group access to the executive branch of the EU for three different interest group types. The hypotheses also investigate an interaction effect, in which access is expected to be conditional of which interest group type that approaches the EC.

The findings indicate that EU membership does affect the likelihood for interest group access to the EU, but converse to the expectation of lesser access for non-EU groups. The various levels of significance in the regression models must be considered, but the results do not reject the possibility of membership being relevant. In fact, the findings suggest a lack of membership may not involve as damaging conditions for interest groups from outside the EU as the theory logic of access goods initially provide speculation for.

Føreord

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List of abbreviations

CoE	Council of the European Union
EC	European Commission
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EEA	European Economic Area
EEC	European Economic Community
EI	Encompassing Interest
EK	Expert knowledge
EP	European Parliament
ESM	European Single Market
ETI	European Transparency Initiative
EU	European Union
EU ETS	EU Emissions Trading System
FTE	Full-time equivalent
IDEI	Information on the Domestic Encompassing Interest
IEEI	Information on the European Encompassing Interest
IG	Interest group
IIA	Interinstitutional Agreement
IRR	Incidence rate ratio
JTRS	Joint Transparency Register Secretariat
LF	LobbyFacts
MNC	Multinational company
MS	Member state
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PS	Public support
RQ	Research question
TIE	Transparency International Europe
TR	Transparency Register

1. Introduction

The European Union has been an undistinguishable creature, which has evolved into one of the world's biggest market economies. The political naturally spans more than economic matters, bringing with it also societal issues. Within societies, the question of influence and the influential is ever-present. One of the private actors aiming to influence is interest groups (Klüver 2012, 491). As will become evident, these interests are diverse in nature and constitutes a complexity similar to the Union in which they operate.

The interest groups present in the political and societal spheres of the Union have been of great interest to interest group scholars. As the European Union itself welcomes the participation of civil society, the literature observes inclusion of both loosely organized interests and movements in addition to firmly institutionalized business interests.

Attempts to understand the dynamic between interest groups and institutions have contributed to progress in terms of theoretical frameworks, which emphasizes the exchange of information in return for interest group access (Bouwen 2002). Other efforts that ought to be attempted is gaining an understanding of the diversity within the interdependent relationship between institutions and interest groups. With that in mind, the following introductory subchapters will explain the relevance, the research question and the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Relevance

Interest groups play a crucial part in EU legislative processes, and the institutions demonstrate an increasing openness towards them (Klüver 2013). The institutions are reliant on input from civil society, and both structured and more loosely organized interests are involved in the steps of creating policy. In society as a whole lobbying is often annotated with a dubious reputation. Questions on the (un)democratic aspects of lobbying are therefore very present. With an increasing amount of interest groups engaging in lobbying towards the EU as it has broadened its political scope and continues evolution into a global regulatory power, the question of interests group efforts is more pertinent than ever.

Essential to an understanding of the information demand from the institutions is the supply side. Interest groups being diverse by nature have different assets, for which their relevance is

dependent on the needs of decision-makers. Scholars within the field of interest group have however not remained dormant, as both sides of the exchange relationship have been sought investigated. Seeing the supply and demand sides in affiliation with lobbying efforts from outside the Union has become a useful objective. Previous empirical research has approached a membership effect but restricted it to geographical regions or policy areas (Mahoney 2008; Gullberg 2011; Miard 2014; Gullberg 2015). To my knowledge, there are currently no studies that have conducted analyses of an EU membership effect on interest group access to the European Union in a broader sense.

To address this gap in the literature, the thesis seeks out to identify factors that explain the different degrees of access given to interest groups across origin and group types. The vastness of EU interest group activity does limit the capacity of such a thesis. With the selection of certain interest group types, the thesis aims to illuminate efforts of certain interest group types that is considered heretofore overlooked.

1.2 Research question

The aim of the thesis is to better understand as well as contribute toward the identified gap in literature regarding the role interest group origin plays in terms of access to EU institutions. More precisely, whether interest groups coming from outside the EU experience different degrees of access than interest groups originating in an EU member state.

With respect to the diverse set of interests represented in the EU's policy environment, the literature tells conflicting stories about the ways different types of interest group interact and how they better interact in pursuit of their goals. While influence is an interesting aspect of interest group research, turning towards access enables investigation of both sides of the interdependent relationship. Does a potential EU 'degree of access' have different implications for the variety of interest groups? To address this issue, the following research question was posed:

How does EU membership affect interest group access to EU institutions, is access subject to interest group type, and how does the type of information provided by interest groups from inside or outside the EU alter their chances for access?

To test the hypotheses, interest group measures are drawn and created from EU public records and EC meeting data made available by a transparency group focusing on EU lobbying.

1.3 Structure

Chapter 2 first introduces the reader to parts of the available theory on interest group literature, with an apt contextualization of interest groups in the European Union. The first subchapter is a brief literature review which includes some of the developments within the extensive field of interest group research in the EU. After having discussed key concepts of the thesis, theoretical explanations for access are specified. Important to this section is the description of the logic of access and interest group's ability to provide institutions with information, in addition to expanding the access goods typology by arguing public support as a supplementary access good. This introduces the identified gap in the literature, where EU membership is pondered a factor with implications for interest group level of access. The gap motivates the research question of the thesis, from which three hypotheses are created. They focus on the interaction between EU membership and the access goods provided by the three interest group types drawn from the LobbyFacts data base.

The theory chapter is followed by chapter 3, which explains the dependent variable number of meetings and the two essential independent variables interest group types and EU membership. Before the selection of control variables, excluded country cases from the data set are accounted for. Norwegian interest groups in the EU are devoted a descriptive subsection, giving some context to non-EU groups. The selected data has bearing on the methodological approach to the analysis, for which negative binomial models are fitted. The results are presented in chapter 4, and chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to theoretical frameworks and empirical background. Chapter 6 summarizes and concludes the research question and provides recommendations for future research.

2. Theory chapter

In this chapter the literature on what is commonly known as lobbying is reviewed, with a particular regard to interest group access to relevant actors in policy influence processes in EU institutions. A broad lens is utilized, with ensuing efforts of grounding the literature in the reality of interest groups in the EU.

Regardless of what is attempted theorized, formalization of named variables plays a collateral and instrumental role in the social science enterprise (Sartori 1984, 97). From the outset, considerable attention is therefore devoted to explaining central concepts in interest group literature, and the phenomena pointed out in the RQ. Among these are an understanding of the environment in which interest groups operate, who they are, strategies employed, and a discussion on the difficulties of measuring influence which has led to a shift towards employing the concept of access as instrumental to certain interest group activities.

These concepts will be contextualized by way of applying theories on lobbying in the EU political system and placed within a theoretical framework by drawing on various approaches to European integration. These approaches to explaining the dynamics of the EU place interest groups (to varying extents) at the center of the legislative processes.

A literature review is conducted in order to present previous findings within the area of EU interest group access to EU institutions. The review identifies a perceived gap in the literature pertaining to an expected fruitful distinction between interest groups originating inside EU member states and interest groups originating outside the Union.

Continuing from the literature review, this chapter outlines the theoretical approach for the analysis and discussion part of the thesis. Whereas the difficulty of measuring influence of interest groups has become apparent, scholars such as Binderkrantz and Pedersen have advocated for the transition to assessment of access, with its arguable methodological advantages (2017). This approach is rooted in the exchange of information in return for access, constituting an interdependent relationship between public and private actors.

The typology of access goods developed by Bouwen (2002) is applied in the operationalization of the relationship between distinct interest group types, making it possible to distinguish

between EU and non-EU interest groups in the structural framework of the relationships among public and private actors in the European Union.

Additionally, public support is described as an access good for non-governmental organizations, who while sharing the goals of more organized interests have different conditions and as such make use of other tools as outsiders in a lobbying strategy perspective.

2.1 Literature review

The issue of interest groups and their influence within the European Union legislative processes is highly debated. While interest groups have been present in the EU from its inception as the ECSC, they have grown considerably in number since its acceleration starting in the 1980s. This is seen in relation to a continuous delegation of regulatory competencies to the EU (Coen and Richardson 2009, 5).

Starting out as a supranational institution controlling ‘mere warfare resources’, the EU today enacts policies ranging from financial stability to tap water quality. This gradual evolvement may have caused a lag in the research interest. Interest groups within the realms of domestic politics has potentially been devoted more attention, with the US as a highly appropriate example (Baumgartner 2007, 483). The reasons for the interest group presence and location in the EU may be explained by theoretical approaches to the development of the European Union.

The theoretical explanations of the EU’s evolution are commonly referred to as theories of European integration. Traditionally, the two major strands of integration theory, neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism (also having a liberal namesake) have emphasized the process of integration more so than the outcome of it (Diez and Wiener 2019, 3). Intergovernmentalism fundamentally holds that member states are fully in charge of cooperation they take part in, collaborating where this is in line with their self-interest.

Liberal intergovernmentalism nuances the MS government self-interest by acknowledging the influence of domestic interests on national preferences (Lelieveldt and Princen 2015, 33-35). The contemporary characteristic of liberal intergovernmentalism as such argues that the competition between EU states is present, but the emergence of preferences are driven by rivaling interests for control over the policy agenda (Hix and Goetz 2000, 1)

The main focus of neo-functionalism are the factors that drive the integration. Among these are national interest groups and such interests operating at a European level. As a consequence of ‘spillover effect’, neo-functionalism downplays the role of governments in the process of integration. Ernst B. Haas as such argued that interest groups and political parties would be key factors in driving integration forward (C.S. Jensen 2019, 56). The interest-driven elites are

thought to appreciate the benefits of regional policies as a consequence of recognizing the limitations of national solutions (Niemann 2020, 118).

The tree of European integration theory is in full bloom, and consequently has a lot more branches than the ones mentioned above. Although placing different emphasis on interest group influence (domestic and European), what seems to be in common is the acknowledgment of their indisputable presence in the EU. The focus on EU interest group studies has as a consequence not diminished. The increase in representation of organized interests eventually led to the emergence of an interest group *system* in the EU (Coen and Richardson 2009, 3).

Beyond catching the eye of researchers, interest groups have also gained a reputation within broader societal strata. Their presence may be construed as a steadily more overarching group of actors in the EU, resulting in discussions of their EU added value. While scholarly interest has been growing alongside interest group prevalence, Bunea and Baumgartner found as late as six years ago supporting evidence for the claim that EU interest group research could still be called a niche field within European political science (2014, 1430).

Diverting from a normative discussion, it is useful to observe interest groups from a more abstract standpoint. Engaging the organized civil society in form of advocacy organizations is frequently used by international organizations, such as the UN and its suborganizations. Greenwood links this to the absence or weakness of links between decision-makers and society as a whole (2019, 21). Society is in this regard expected to better be able to communicate with those in charge of making decisions. The presence of interest group and their inclusion in policy-making processes has therefore become both customary and expected, in domestic politics and in the EU.

The increase in representation has led to a plethora of interests represented close to or in proximity to relevant actors. For this thesis, concerned with interest groups aiming their work toward the European Commission as the EU institution considered most susceptible to interest group efforts, the institution proximity translates into the EU capital Brussels. Diverse as society itself, the interests present span trade unions, environmental organizations, beekeepers, and chimney sweeps. The interest representation in the EU has undergone a process of formalization since the establishment of the ECSC. Among these is the institutionalization of

formerly less organized civic interests and interest groups seeking together in coalitions (Richardson 2006, 5).

While the growing interest diversity can be ascribed the bigger regulatory scope of the EU, it is reasonable to see the growing number of interest group in relation to the institutional demands of the EU. The EC reaches out to civil society groups in consultation processes, to ensure they have proper information for the specific policy area, and policy input during the drafting stages (Albareda and Braun 2019, 468). With the EU becoming an increasingly bigger regulatory power, its openness towards stakeholders is central to the legitimacy of its law-making (Korkea-Aho 2016, 45).

The amount of interest group efforts in shaping policy is substantial. As these entities are expected to maintain the interests of their members (be it citizens, businesses, or beekeepers), influencing decision-makers becomes their *raison d'être*. Research on the influence of interest groups therefore seems both expected and worthwhile. As will become evident in the conceptual framework subchapter, influence as a phenomenon is conceptually slippery and easily escapes the hand of the investigator simply asking, “what am I looking for?”. As the field of interest group studies has evolved, other potentially useful measures of interest group success have been pinpointed. Most notably, this concerns access to the public actors, which becomes a qualification for influence.

The respective goals of interest groups and public actors pave the way for a mutually beneficial relationship. This relationship between interest groups and EU institutions is considered to be a two-way street in which resources are exchanged (Bouwen 2002, 365). Creating a dynamic of interdependence, interest groups provide information in return for access. As the following conceptual framework will show, a distinction is made between two types of interest group strategies. These diverging approaches also have implications for the interpretation of the mutually beneficial relationship because not all interest groups seek access to the institutions. The outside strategy employed by some interest groups as such differ from those groups entertaining an interdependent relationship in which access is granted in return of information.

2.2 Conceptual framework

The thesis has already in these preliminary sections applied an assortment of terms and concepts frequently used in scholarly works to understand the nature of interest groups in the EU. Alerted by the prospective equivalence fallacies in EU interest group literature, efforts have been made to avoid classic incidents of comparing apples and oranges within the interest group flora. By defining the key concepts in the thesis, mutual understanding of the phenomena can be ensured (Marczyk, DeMatteo, and Festinger 2005, 7). This subchapter describes the EU in which interest groups play their part in political processes, explains the variety of interest groups, and the activities conducted by these groups under the infamous label ‘lobbying’. Lastly, the concepts of influence and access are problematized and elaborated on, providing a conceptual basis for the analysis of interest groups.

2.2.1 The European Union

In order to ascertain the role of interest groups within the EU, it is vital to have an understanding of the Union itself. Commenting on the development of the EU, EC President Jacques Delors presaged in 1985 a potential *unidentified political object* as the Union’s dimensions expanded (Manners 2013, 473). The object in question has travelled at great velocity, and has escaped labels such as nation, state, and federation (Hooghe and Marks 2008, 108). Attempts to allocate the EU within a taxonomy of the international global society has led it to be described as *sui generis* – in a class of its own (Klabbers 2016, 3). This conception had impact on EU interest group studies, as the interest groups were thought to operate in a unique environment. Later research has on the other hand, with taking into account institutional and political differences, applied a comparative approach for instance by comparison of the interest group system in the US (Mahoney 2008, 6; Woll 2007, 457)

Though challenging to find similar constructions, Hix and Høyland conceptualizes the EU as a political system (2011, 12). This political system consists of 27 member states (MS), which the European Union itself describes as an economic and political union (2021). Since its inception the EU has had a continuously, but at varying paces, higher extent of supranational decision-making in combination with higher degree of policy integration (Hix and Høyland 2011, 10). By conceptualizing the EU as a political system, social scientists in the late 1980s and early 1990s were enabled to apply tools and methods from the comparative study of political systems

to the EU. Among the questions that better could be answered is “who are influential in the institutional structure and the environment by which it is surrounded” (Hix 2014, 391).

Similar to the presence of interest groups in other political systems, the increasing regulatory scope of the EU has caused the interest group population in the EU to expand (Eising 2008, 9). This population of interests aiming to seek influence in the EU, whether it be from within or outside, is the focal point of the thesis. As will become apparent by discovering its inherent diversity, it is a concept that is still sought to be understood.

2.2.2 What are interest groups?

The variety of interests in the EU makes conceptual ambiguity particularly evident for interest groups. As a consequence of the variety within interest group systems, interest group studies have faced tremendous difficulties in producing far-reaching generalizations (Eising 2008, 5). Consequently, studies into what has become a broad span of organizations have been labeled under the colloquial ‘interest group umbrella’ (Jordan, Halpin, and Maloney 2004, 195).

As argued by Dür and De Bièvre, interest groups in a democratic context is a major channel through which organized civic groups can express their opinions to decision-makers (2007, 1). From this argument, it is clear that interest groups serve a purpose. Similar to individual citizens, organized interests may employ the ‘voice’ alternative in their attempt to change policy, regulation or activity (Hirschman 1970, 30). What sets interest groups apart from other entities evidently thus needs further clarification.

Seeking to avoid conceptual ambiguity, identifying key features of interest groups is therefore a pertinent ambition. As identified by Beyers, Eising and Maloney, interest groups are distinctive by three factors: organization, political interests, and informality. *Organization* speaks to the nature of the group, and as such excludes broad movements and waves of public opinion. This implies some sort of organizational structure, be it a smaller or larger (organized) groups. *Political interests* point to efforts made by interest groups to influence policy outcomes. Interest groups therefore have a political aim. Lastly, *informality* relates to the fact that interest groups do not seek public office or compete in elections. Goals are rather pursued by means of interacting with politicians and bureaucrats (2008, 1106).

These three characteristics enlighten the vague picture of interest groups. Diverging definitions put emphasis on other aspects and employ other factors for identification. Complicating this concept further, it has been argued that the most influential types of interest groups are further from the core image of interest groups that is deployed by researchers in the field (Jordan, Halpin, and Maloney 2004, 200). As this is held to be the case in institutional contexts in general, it is not unlikely that this holds true also for an EU interest group context despite its status as a perceivably ‘special case’ of a political system.

Using these features as a backdrop for interest groups is not, however, without fault. By probing the organizational aspect of interest groups, there has been no deep agreement on the threshold from informal to formally organized interests (Jordan, Halpin, and Maloney 2004, 204). Due to this ambiguity, interest group characteristics may differ, and may be highly and more loosely organized.

Depending on the type of interest group, they have different objectives. While the basic interest of any organization is survival, the role-specific interests are different. This can be illustrated by use of the two examples associations and companies. The two require certain objects in order to survive: the prior needs to acquire members and the latter needs customers for their goods and services in order to maximize profitability (Klüver 2013, 26).

While both executive and legislative branches of government are dealing with a complexity of policy areas, interest groups are as hinted towards by its name more refined in their interests. The variety of policy domains handled by public institutions pave the way for specific knowledge of areas, making an entry point for organizations that draw on experiences and know-how of their members. Interest groups therefore maintain expert knowledge, and enjoy information advantages over legislators (Klüver 2012, 491). This informational aspect of interest groups will be argued to be the core element of interest groups’ position and role within the EU interest representation.

Turning to interest groups in the EU sphere, applying the three features provides a reasonable understanding of interest groups which will be the focus of the thesis. The definitory complexity of interest group is partially redeemed by employing a functionalist approach, in which a separation of different interests is stressed (Erne 2014, 238-239). The EU itself has defined the activity of interest group, in which emphasis is added to the operational aspect of IGs, namely

the ambition of influencing policy processes and implementation. This definition is used to conceptualize the activity of IGs and is further elaborated in the following subchapter.

An important comment with reference to the thesis is the use of the colloquial term “interest group” to indicate any entity aiming at influencing the EU institutions. While some organizations by its nature are ‘pure’ interest groups, this term is used to describe all of the registered companies, associations, and NGOs identified in subchapter 3.1.3.1.

2.2.3 What is lobbying?

Lobbying is a highly charged term, perceived differently throughout EU member states and beyond (Greenwood 2017, 1). While the majority of public sentiment undoubtedly speaks toward a negative public perception, lobbying is considered to play a legitimate and important role in a healthy democratic system (Dialer and Richter 2019, 5). This role is by Robert Dahl only considered democratically beneficial if the system, in which lobbying takes place, avoids a situation in which influence is systematically biased. Such a scenario would entail opposing interests respectively constantly winning and losing (Klüver 2013, 3).

While the presence of lobbying may be evident, its nature is not. Difficulties of defining a concept reaching into and across a wide array of activities has been a cause for controversy since EU institutions initially wanted to implement a strategy towards policy-influencing activities in the early 90s (Mihut 2008, 6). This ambition led to an Interinstitutional Agreement (IIA) in 2011 between the European Parliament and the European Commission, seeking to fill regulatory loopholes for EU lobbying activity. With that, the EU Transparency Register was born (Greenwood 2017, 60). The agreement gave the following definition of lobbying:

“all activities ... carried out with the objective of directly or indirectly influencing the formulation or implementation of policy and the decision-making processes of the EU institutions, irrespective of where they are undertaken and of the channel or medium of communication used, for example via outsourcing, media, contracts with professional intermediaries, think tanks, platforms, forums, campaigns and grassroots initiatives” (European Commission 2014).

This definition is considered wide-ranging, particularly because of its breadth in including indirect activities. A 2016 proposal for revision of the IIA narrowed the definitional scope, by considering lobbying as “activities which promote certain interests by interacting with any of the three signatory institutions”, stating the need for “the objective to influencing formulation or implementation of policy or legislation” (Greenwood 2017, 62).¹ While this proposal alters the definition of what falls under the interest group umbrella, it expands the regulatory scope of the TR and was expected to strengthen enforcement mechanisms and improve management structures (Bunea 2018, 1580).

Seeing as the thesis is concerned with EU interest groups, lobbying needs to be placed in a European context. As of 2019, the EU Transparency Register included close to 12,000 registrants including consultancy firms, business associations, and NGOs (Joint Transparency Registry Secretariat 2020a, 2). As is evident by the amount of interest groups operating within the EU sphere, their *modi operandi* constitute a variety of activities used for achieving their individual goals.

The functional definition gives an indication of the complexity and diversity of lobbying as a practical concept in the EU context, to which interest groups are not unique. In its simplest form, lobbying allows the voice of citizen groups, associations, corporations and others to be heard in the political arena, by enabling them to present views to government officials (Berg 2009, 1). These different approaches to lobbying reveal themselves in *lobbying strategies*. An early distinction made by Schattschneider in 1935 paved the way for a strand of interest group literature concerned with *insider* and *outsider* strategies. These two variants were summarized as “‘insiders’ who knew very much and ‘outsiders’ who knew very little” (Dür and Mateo 2016, 16).

Dür and Mateo define inside lobbying to include activities aimed at influencing decision-makers, while outside lobbying refers to activities aimed at mobilizing and/or changing public opinion (2016, 70). Applying an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ label to an interest group in a dichotomous manner need not, however, be a straightforward task, as groups may e.g. systematically combine public strategies with the use of inside strategies (Beyers 2004, 235).

¹ On 27 April 2021 the European Parliament adopted a new IIA between the EP, EC, and CoE.

For sake of conceptualization, it is yet possible to conceive of these concepts as two types of groups that ‘work from within’ or ‘work from the outside’.

More concretely, these different approaches to lobbying entail for inside strategies the aim of establishing direct contact with decision-makers and exchanging information. Outside strategies refer to demonstrations or protests to pressure decision-makers by increasing the awareness of the general public (Klüver 2013, 14). Complex political systems such as the EU, with several points of entry and a broad regulatory scope may benefit from a more nuanced distinction between insiders and outsiders.

As different channels are expected to dictate specific access requirements, interests may find it productive to combine different channels in order to gain access to the EU legislative processes as a whole (Bouwen 2004a, 359). Maloney et al. for instance nuances the sorting of interest groups into two categories; those who are ‘core insider groups’ and those who are not (1994, 37).

While the distinction between insiders and outside without doubt contributes to a better grasp on the concept of interest group strategies, it ought to be problematized a bit further to avoid the notion of strategies as a straight-forward venture. Different interest groups are strategizing independently of one another, meaning also that similar interest groups may choose dissimilar strategies.

As such, a combination of insider and outsider strategies may be employed. Ultimately this is up to the leadership of the individual interest group’s leadership, requiring them to balance the advantages and disadvantages of opting for insider or outsider strategies (Beyers, Eising, and Maloney 2008, 1121). These indubitably carefully weighted strategy decisions may of course result in a combination of efforts featuring both insider and outsider methods.

2.2.4 What is influence?

In a broad sense, the study of politics is the study of influence and the influential (Lasswell 1950, 3). Who the influential are, becomes interesting questions as states in Western societies have consolidated their autonomy vis-à-vis social groups by including them in government matters (Heins 2005, 162). Lobbying as a way for interests to express their opinions to decision-

makers, in turn, begs the question of which participants make their voices heard. With interest groups seeking to affect the outcome of policy-making, the study of influence is as such an important area within interest groups literature (Klüver 2013, 1).

Dür explains that influence is generally understood as the ability of an actor to shape decisions in line with their preferences (2008b, 561). The inherent complexity of defining and measuring preferences of an actor and potential success in policy-shaping is illustrated by for instance the existence of different channels of influence (Dür 2008b, 561). This is particularly evident by the fact that EU legislative processes take place in a multilevel Europe (Dür and Mateo 2016, 6).

Pursuant to the convoluted nature of influence in an EU interest studies context, defining and measuring influence is considered among the most troublesome tasks for interest group researchers (Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2017, 306). The difficulty of measuring influence is not new, and the issue has been addressed by researchers for some time (Dür 2008a, 1223). While influence is not at the core of the thesis, an understanding of the concept from a scholarly perspective is necessary in order to understand why looking into interest group access is important to that end. This is in fact an understanding of the approaches of interest groups which with its influence seeks to change the minds of the people who decide on a given issue in a political context (Lelieveldt and Princen 2015, 138).

2.2.5 What is access?

Truman argued that an ultimate requirement for power of any kind is access to one or more key points of decision in the government. In the process of reaching those who are sought influenced, access becomes the *facilitating intermediate objective* of political interest groups (1951, 264). Keeping in mind the potentially blurry distinction between insider and outsider strategies, theoretical developments following Truman's seminal work has nuanced this claim following interest group's ability to alternate strategies in an ever more complex and dense EU interest group system (Beyers 2004, 235).

As argued above, measuring influence is considered a challenging enterprise in political science due to its inherent conceptual ambiguity (Bouwen 2004a, 474). Seen in relation to influence, access has been considered a more empirically feasible concept in assessing the role of interest

groups (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2020, 290-291). Access as a proxy for influence has therefore been established as an entry point for interest group scholars, across countries and lobbying venues, including that of the EU (Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2017, 308).

Access per se is not a less complicated concept to grasp compared to influence. In fact, similarly to discussions on influence as a concept, diverging views on definitions and operationalizations of access has resulted in intuitive understandings rather than explicit definitions (Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2017, 307). In an attempt at easing methodological concerns on interest group access, Binderkrantz and Pedersen developed a general definition which laid the groundwork for comparable studies on access. Reviewing empirical studies, they find scholars applying different aspects in their conceptualization, hereunder information networks, meetings, and attention (2017, 309). From their experience, access has had different degrees of formality.

Schattschneider's quote is illustrative of the conceptual ambiguity which follows from seeing insiders as those who have achieved some form of access. By using the approach of Binderkrantz and Pedersen, some of these uncertainties are remedied. Their two-requirement definition encompasses more than, e.g. information networks, but it is narrower than a definition of access including any type of direct contact between interest groups and decision-makers (Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2017, 310-311).

Through a conceptual discussion, Binderkrantz and Pedersen review these different conceptualizations of access in the literature. They arrive at a definition of access as being present when a group has entered a political arena, passing a threshold controlled by relevant gatekeepers. This definition has two implications for the operationalization; interest groups need to seek access, and relevant gatekeepers need to allow access (Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2017, 307). Seeing this in relation to the various interpretations of access, their definition distinguishes simply getting attention from decision-makers as contact to not meet the threshold of the access requirements.

Access has been identified as a useful indicator for interest group efforts. Both seeking and achieving access does not, however, mean that access equals influence. Circling back to different activities of interest groups, namely the distinction between inside and outside strategies, a useful reminder from Bouwen is that influence on the other hand does not necessarily mean that access has been given (2004b, 474). The distinction between those who

are granted access and those are not has enabled innovative approaches to interest group research, for instance group recognition on Twitter a first step towards access (Ibenskas and Bunea 2020, 561).

The steps of access contributed by Binderkrantz and Pedersen provide a clear overview of the process regardless of interest group type: those who want it have to seek it in order to be classified as 'access has been given'. This theoretical development of interest group efforts offers interesting new approaches to understanding the initiation of relationships between interest groups seeking to influence and decision-makers.

As Coen et al. neatly summarizes, is access given in certain venues and to certain degrees based on two factors: the goodness of fit between resources interest groups can provide, and the institutional opportunities of the public body in question (2021a, 12). The wish of decision-makers to grant access due to information demand is discussed in the following sub-chapter.

2.3 Theoretical explanations

Having covered some key aspects of EU interest group literature, the two following subchapters have been developed to illuminate the abstract mechanisms between interest groups and the EU institutions. In addition to describing the demand side for access goods, an argument is made for another non-tangible resource in demand by decision-makers. The theoretical explanations are seen in relation to the role of interest groups in the EU with regards to the theories of European integration discussed in the literature review.

2.3.1 Exchange theory and the logic of access

Understanding lobbying activities conducted by interest groups in the EU requires an understanding of the relationship between the private actors (interest groups) and the public actors (EU institutions). While the providing of information by interest groups was early recognized, the focus on the demand-side of this relationship was pointed to as a shortcoming of earlier research on informational exchange (Chalmers 2011, 41).

The development of exchange models provided a framework aimed at explaining the relationship between interest groups and institutions at the European level (Bouwen 2002, 368). The EU has already been established as different from domestic political systems, which also has implications for interest group dynamics. Bouwen conceptualizes the interaction between private and public institutions in the EU sphere as a series of inter-organizational exchanges (2002, 368). To a great extent the access is determined by resources that are intangible: knowledge, information and expertise (Taminiau and Wilts 2006, 122).

Bouwen's reasoning builds on exchange models initially developed in the realm of sociology explaining inter-organizational relations. According to Levine and White, the organizational exchanges are "any voluntary activity between two organizations which has consequences, actual or anticipated, for the realization of their respective goals or objectives" (1961, 588). In the EU context, this translates to interactions between the interest groups and the relevant EU institutions with the aim of influencing policies to that end.

By drawing on the resource dependence perspective of Pfeffer and Salancik, Bouwen introduces the idea of ensuing interdependence following the exchanges. As organizations are not internally self-sufficient, the activity between actors facilitates the dynamic of an exchange

relation between two groups of interdependent organizations (Bouwen 2002, 368). A general agreement in interest group literature is the decision-makers' need for external information, and that the ambiguous influence increases with the amount of information interest groups can supply (Klüver 2013, 14).

By applying this dynamic to the context in question where interest groups and EU institutions interact, Bouwen develops a typology of the resources being exchanged. The resources are called 'access goods', and establish the interdependence:

“Access goods are goods provided by private actors to the EU institutions in order to gain access. Each access good concerns a specific kind of information that is important in the EU decision-making process. The criticality of an access good for the functioning of an EU institution determines the degree of access that the institutions will grant to the private interest representatives” (2002, 369-370).

The usefulness of information on a policy area in order to create effective legislation has been acknowledged for quite some time and consequently precedes the need for information in the current legislative environment of the EU. This early recognized need is what Bouwen relates to expertise and technical know-how from the private sector in a political system. He considers this information be crucial in order for the EU to develop effective legislation in any given policy area, such as input from banks to craft new capital adequacy rules for commercial banks (Bouwen 2002, 369).

Bouwen's typology includes two additional types of information, providing an exchange model applicable to the legislative environment of the EU. The informational need of an institution involved in the legislative process differs depending on its place within the structure of the EU; concretely what their role is and on whose behalf they act. The Commission, crafting legislative proposals, are in need of EK as mentioned above.

The European Parliament fills another part in the political system, as the institution represents European citizens through directly elected representatives. The institution's broad point of view requires information from a 'European perspective' in order to evaluate the Commission's proposal. For the Council members, in order to bargain between member states, it requires

information depending on the different member states' opinions on legislative proposals (Chalmers 2013, 41).

Inherent to a typological approach, the classification of access goods constitutes a theoretical framework. This means that they are tools intended to better understand the dynamics of informational exchanges, and not necessarily clear-cut limitations of the interdependent relationships. With information being the common characteristic for the access goods, Bouwen labels the already acknowledged information need within the interdependent relationship as Expert Knowledge (EK). The two additional access goods take up in them the *encompassing interest* in two different settings: the European encompassing and domestic encompassing interest. The access goods are presented in Table 1. With exemplifications in Bouwen's sectoral approach by the proposal of capital adequacy rules for commercial banks, the three goods are:

1. **Expert Knowledge (EK)** concerns expertise and technical competences from the private sector in order to understand the market. EK is in this case technical expertise provided by specific banks in order to understand particularities of the market itself.
2. **Information about the European Encompassing Interest (IEEI)** concerning information required from the private sector in order to consider the 'European perspective'. Exemplified by information provided by a European federation relaying the needs and interests of its members relating to capital adequacy rules.
3. **Information about the Domestic Encompassing Interest (IDEI)** concerns the information required from a sector within a domestic market. For the case of capital adequacy rules, information provided by a national association on the needs and interests of its members in the particular domestic market (Bouwen 2002, 369).

By developing his framework, Bouwen was able to generate testable hypotheses about the access of business interests to the European institutions (2002, 383). With reference to the diversity of interests seeking to influence legislative outcomes, it was held that the framework did not constitute a "one size fits all" for explanation of informational exchanges. As Pollack argues, the representation of *diffuse interests* in the Commission relating to collective interests of larger numbers of individuals (such as NGOs or loosely organized interests) is differently maintained than those of business interests (Pollack 1997, 587).

While the framework is not universally applicable in an EU context, it did however provide a tool to shed light on the link between public and certain private actors. As will be discussed later, these business interests make up a majority of EU interest groups registered in the Transparency Register (Joint Transparency Registry Secretariat 2020a, 2). The hypotheses derived from the research question will as such majorly concern business interests following this division of interest group types.

2.3.2 Public support as an access good

By conceptualizing the dynamic of the relationship between organizations and institutions using Bouwen's theoretical framework, there is an understanding of access goods concerning information. In addition to his contribution, there are arguably complementary goods that are considered useful for interest organizations by way of gaining public support. As opposed to informational exchanges, public support per se is not considered to be consequential to insider strategies.

Coined as 'voice' strategies by Beyers, outsider strategies reveal themselves in public arenas and is different from insider strategies in the way that transmission of information from associations to policy-makers occurs indirectly (2004, 214). Outside lobbying is as such conducted in a manner of for instance protests or demonstrations to exert pressure on policy-making via the public arena (Klüver 2013, 62).

The form of protests and demonstrations is severalfold, ranging from their literal meanings of street protests to media dissemination. The goal of outside lobbying may coincide with the ambitions of inside lobbying; to shape legislative process. Outside lobbying is however concerned with mobilizing and/or changing public opinion in pursuit of this goal (Dür and Mateo 2016, 70).

Alike the interdependent relationship between inside strategy interest groups and EU institutions, the relationship between non-governmental organizations and elected politicians can be seen as an exchange relationship (Giger and Klüver 2016, 192). As argued by Klüver and Pickup, one of the mechanisms in which this relationship becomes evident is the ability of interest groups to provide electoral support (2019, 95).

As elected officials are agents of the electorate, according to the rational-choice theories developed by Downs, it is reasonable to believe that politicians ideally resonate the voice of their constituents in order to ensure their own viability (Strøm 1990, 594). Research on government responsiveness speaks toward a correspondence between public policy and public opinion, but it varies across policy areas and countries (Klüver and Pickup 2019, 92). Given the assumption that governments' preferences include reelection to ensure continued control over executive offices, they have clear incentives to respond to voter preferences. In addition to being exposed to the will of the people, governments are faced with interest groups seeking to influence policy-making in their favor. (Klüver and Pickup 2019, 94).

Among the factors in the equation of gain or loss of electoral support is the issues that arise in the public sphere. The process in which these issues reach the public has by agenda-setting scholars been separated into three different ways in which agendas are analyzed by way of strategy choices: outside initiatives, mobilization, and inside access (Lelieveldt and Princen 2015, 211). These are to different extents linked to insider strategies, but common for these models when taking place in the EU is the distance between institutions and the electorate as opposed to in domestic political systems. As a result of the prevalence of interest groups employing insider strategies, EU policy-makers are less vulnerable to public opinion (Lelieveldt and Princen 2015, 149). Another aspect here is the distance between the voters and the EU decision-makers.²

The important thing to keep in mind here is the application of the models of agenda-setting and ensuing lobbying in a different political landscape. As was mentioned, there are disparities about how decision-makers are susceptible to their electorate's approval or disapproval of proposed policy. With regards to the EU public support, this support is in electoral terms made up by the 27 member states and their citizens. The public support affects the institutions on different levels. While Members of the European Parliament are directly elected, EU citizens are represented by their governments in the European Council and the Council of the European Union (Burns 2019, 185; Lewis 2019, 158)

Constituting the three institutions of policymaking, the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission are all in focus for interest groups, while literature has established that the EC

² Elaborated on in subchapter 3.1.1.1.

is considered a main target for lobbying due to its right of initiative and consequently produces legislative proposals. Being the target of interest groups then is expected to relate to providing information, connected to insider strategies and the logic of access. In the case of public support, the literature paints a different picture as public support is first and foremost of importance to the European Parliament and Council.

Public support is not necessarily a resource for the Commission in its own right, but it is by extension nonetheless so as the stamp of approval from the EP and the CoE on legislative proposals is necessary for the EC to enact proposed policies. Concretely, the need for citizen support comes from the reelection objectives of Members of the European Parliament and national governments in the Council (Klüver 2013, 207). Following the reasoning that any organization's main objective is survival, public support is additionally considered important by the EC as it adds legitimacy to the policy initiatives (Klüver 2013, 46)

For interest groups employing outsider strategies and working by shaping public opinion on certain matters, some of these are benefitting from salience of a policy. Klüver found this effect to be limited to the biggest interest group actor within a policy area (2011, 502). An example of this could be the credibility of environmental organization World Wildlife Fund in climate and environment issues and the consequences for biodiversity in Europe.

In fact, Klüver concludes about the relevance of the different resources information, citizen support, and economic power that citizen support is an equally important asset in the lobbying game (Klüver 2013, 207). Having attempted to validate the introduction of public support as a 'good' alike Bouwen's access goods, there is a basis for operationalization of access by interest groups providing public support in the forthcoming analysis.

Access good	Description
Expert knowledge (EK)	Expertise and technical know-how in particular policy area – understanding the market
Information about the European Encompassing interest (IEEI)	Information from the private sector on European implications (EU level associations)
Information about the Domestic Encompassing Interest (IDEI)	Information from the private sector on domestic implications (national level)
Public support (PS)	Providing citizen support for policy proposals

Table 1: Overview of access goods

2.4 Gap in literature

At the core of social science is the cumulation of knowledge enabling scientific development to take place by building on previous findings. During the literature search, it became apparent that while both the influence of interest groups and their access to the EU institutions and their processes are of scholarly interest, little research has been conducted on interest group origin and the opportunities for interest groups from outside the Union to gain access alongside their EU counterparts. This subchapter aims to explore the identified gap in EU interest group literature.

2.4.1 Membership as explanatory factor for access

Frameworks have been developed in order to theorize how interest groups within the EU conduct lobbying and represent themselves. While these are useful contributions for EU interest groups, a considerably smaller amount of research has investigated lobbying activities from outside the EU. Is a greater focus on interest groups from outside the EU even justifiable? Does country of origin simply not matter, or is it reasonable to consider that circumstances are different for interest groups from outside the EU?

As has been established, the scope of EU regulation activities has widened over the years, following deepening European integration. Given the size of the EU's internal market, external actors may be incentivized to behave in a way that generally accommodates or meets EU rules (Damro 2015, 1336). To a greater extent, interest groups situated outside the EU are affected by the outcomes of EU legislative processes as the EU broadens its policy portfolio and claim

standing in a global context. This may be part of the explanation as to why third country actors seek a stake in EU regulation (Korkea-Aho 2016, 46-47). The regulatory standards of the EU often supersede those of other markets, and as the EC wrote in a 2007 working paper has “made the Union a reference point in third countries as well as in global and regional fora” (Bradford 2020, 21).

As a result of the expansion of internal and external EU competences in combination with deepening economic integration, the exercise of authority and powers of the EU transcends its internal borders (Korkea-Aho 2016, 46). Following the EU’s development into a bigger legislative power, results of policy processes therefore also have implications beyond the borders of the Union. While this border-transcending enlargement has shown more recently the consequences within the interest group sphere, the EU has not emerged as a growing international actor overnight (Smith 2006, 296). One of the demonstrable consequences of this inside the EU is the diversifying bloc of interest groups.

In addition to an increase of member-state business interests represented in Brussels, there has accordingly been an increase in representation of interests originating from outside the EU. Coen & Richardson illustrate by the presence of American companies such as Ford and IBM who established their presence during the interest group boom between 1980 and 2000 (2009, 155). Research looking into the lobbying of business interests both in America and Asia substantiate the claim of a raising number of outside-EU interest groups choosing to allocate resources to EU lobbying (Miard 2014, 76). By looking into outside-EU interest groups in 2016 it was found that 9 % of Transparency Register entries were non-EU actors (Korkea-Aho 2016, 46).

This presence of non-EU interest groups in Brussels is not limited to overseas companies. Without leaving the continent there is the apparent example of the European Economic Area (EEA), which comprises both EU-member states and associated countries. The EEA consists of the current 27 EU member states and the three countries of the European Free Trade Association (Eurostat 2020a). The 30 countries make up the European Single Market (ESM), the internal market of the EU in which Union law applies (European Commission 2021b). The EFTA EEA states are currently Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein (European Free Trade Association 2020).

The EEA Agreement, which came into force in 1994, allowed the then seven EFTA states to participate in the EU internal market. Being dynamic in nature, new EU legislation that covers areas affected by the agreement is annexed to the EEA agreement upon agreement by EFTA Joint Committee (European Free Trade Association 2021). In practical terms, new EU law as such becomes EFTA law with only EU member states taking part in the legislative processes (Gullberg 2015, 1533).

For the case of the biggest EFTA economy, Norway had as of 2012 implemented two thirds of EU law, and as a consequence EU/EEA law makes up a considerable amount of domestic legislation in Norway (NOU 2012:2, 130). This implementation has led to the description of Norway as being as implemented in the EU as member states (Eriksen and Fossum 2014, 220). Without delving into other research fields, the Norwegian government reported that in 2019 78,7 % of Norway's exports (including oil and gas) went to the EU (Søreide 2020).

Although avoiding further digressions of questions on market access, it should be noted that the ESM as such covers Norway's biggest export interests. Norwegian business interests' demand for favorable legislation in the EU are as such a reasonable assumption. Bernhagen & Mitchell found supporting evidence for their 'national patronage hypothesis' when conducting a study on business interest representation in the EU. With the absence of a government patron advocating national interests, EEA country interests that are not EU members are considered likely to pursue their own lobbying efforts in Brussels (Bernhagen and Mitchell 2009, 171).

By returning to Binderkrantz and Pedersen's interest group research and review of access in the literature, arguing that access is a prerequisite for interest group influence is not a contentious claim. Drawing on Bouwen's logic of access, it is also clear that in order to gain a 'seat at the table' one needs to do more than ask. The ability to provide *access goods* is crucial in order to establish a relationship of exchange with the institution in question (Bouwen 2004a, 341).

Alongside the development of the EU as a political union, Korkea-Aho argues that it has built an open regulatory architecture allowing the acknowledgment of third country actors as the EU's stakeholders (Korkea-Aho, 67). The openness then serves the purpose of attracting non-EU actors to the ESM with the consequence of encouraging and incentivizing actors outside of the Union to exert their possibilities of shaping regulatory processes.

This brings us back to the diversity of interest groups operating within the EU sphere. Due to its increased legislative reach explained above, which transcends the borders of the EU and its internal market, interest groups outside of the Union also have stakes in the policy processes. This is true both of foreign firms and companies participating in the internal market e.g., by selling products, as well as associated countries adhering to EU law such as non-member countries under the EEA Agreement.

While the association with the EU differs between member states, EFTA EEA states, and companies outside the internal market in relation to adhering to EU law, the question is whether or not mechanisms by which information is transmitted do. Based on Bouwen's theoretical framework on access to EU institutions with regards to the interdependent relationship between interest groups and institutions, the important factor is first and foremost organizational characteristics and capacity of representation (Bouwen 2004a, 359). From this assessment, it is not expected that interest group affiliation to the EU based on the group's home country affect the ability to gain access when correcting for interest group types.

Ensuing empirical studies have, however, concluded that membership should be explored as a factor. Miard did find support for her claim of interest groups choosing different lobbying strategies based on membership. During the revision of the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), Swedish and Norwegian firms chose differently in terms of lobbying routes, where Norwegian firms lobbied less directly to the EU institutions (Miard 2014, 86). This disparity between Norwegian and Swedish groups were linked to lack of Norwegian authorities' access to EU institutions compared to Swedish authorities, leading Norwegian interest groups to prioritize lobbying through European associations.

While Miard's findings must be considered restricted to the explored sector or states, they allude to the core of the research question regarding differences between interest groups from inside or outside the EU. Referring to the core task of interest groups of influencing policy processes, and assuming they are rational actors seeking to maximize their influence by the means they have available, it is reasonable to believe that they allocate resources in their strategy choices where they find it to be more valuable (Klüver 2013, 26). An extension of this reflection is the assumption of actors outside the EU to aim these efforts towards gaining access.

2.5. Theoretical argument

Relying on the relationship between interest groups and their public counterpart – the EU institutions – mentioned above, several factors which position and explain interest groups' place in EU legislative processes have been discussed. As has been explored, membership has been found to have impacted interest group activity in certain EU policy fields. While this does not dictate interest group successfulness, the interest group origin as a factor for access is considered an aspect worth investigating. As a complex political system, the factor of inside/outside origin should be seen as supplementing the ones that to a varying extent already have been investigated by interest group researchers.

Interest group research has in its essence already devoted great attention to differences between groups, whether this is materialized in, for example, in resources, group type or strategies. What is common for most of the literature, is that these differences are researched within the same environment. The lion's share of theoretical frameworks developed to explain dynamics of EU legislative processes naturally concern EU interest groups. Apart from scarce empirical evidence on non-EU interest groups influence of EU institutions, it is challenging to find theoretical explanations of differing conditions between EU and non-EU interest in theoretic frameworks.

The thesis is therefore concerned with applying the theoretical framework of resource exchange to both EU and non-EU interest groups. This will be investigated by looking into the goods provided by interest groups to one of the major EU institutions.

2.5.1 Approaching the European Commission

In earlier research on EU interest groups, the European Commission was traditionally considered the most important lobbying target (Mazey and Richardson 1999, 111). As the power dynamic between the European Commission as the executive branch and its legislative counterparts has shifted, it is not unreasonable to assume that this could also have affected the institutional approaches of interest group to exert influence. More recent literature does however still see the EC as the more strategic objective for influence, as substantiated below.

By making up the institutional structure of the European Union, it is evident that while working independently, the European Parliament, The Council, and the European Commission together make up the legislative process which produces EU law. As such, the ultimate objective would be to investigate what Bouwen calls intra-institutional hypotheses in order to assess the role of access to the institutions that are targeted by interest groups (Bouwen 2002, 384). This is without a doubt an activity very broad in scope. Limiting the scope to include only the European Commission as such requires validation. The main argument is considered to be interest groups' and the Commission's particular mutual interest for creating policy communities and policy networks sustainable over time (Mazey and Richardson 2006, 241).

The European Commission as the executive institution of the EU is charged with the task of staking out the course and further development of the EU. This role is vested in the Commission by the mandate of promoting common European interests, and the institution is as such considered the most supranational institution in the decision-making process (Bouwen 2004a, 346). Given the Commission's role as agenda-setter, it caters to a variety of societal interests for input on its legislative proposals (Bouwen 2009, 20).

As has been shown, inputs span interests far and wide, ranging from technical information (EK), domestic interests (IDEI), concerns for the EU in its vastness (IEEI), and public support. IEEI can in an EU perspective be considered the lowest common denominator for the member states. Interest groups providing the information is necessary as it makes the relationship mutually beneficial (Bouwen 2004a, 339). By recognizing the role of the Commissions as the main target for interest groups, looking into the contact with interest groups is believed to be a potentially fruitful exercise. As the thesis is concerned with a potential effect of membership on interest group access, this is considered a reasonable delimitation given non-EU countries' lack of representation in Parliament and the Council.

Returning to the diversity of interests represented in the abstract vicinity of the EU institutions, it has been shown that these different organized interests in form of interest groups may experience different conditions in the environment in which they operate. Concerned with assessing whether membership is a factor in terms of access to EU institutions, the thesis turns to formulating testable hypotheses for this reason.

2.6 Hypotheses

The theory chapter has illustrated parts of the intricate mechanisms that enable the exchange of information from interest groups to the EC in return for access to the same. With the research question asking about an EU membership effect, interest group type, and information type hypotheses have been developed as a means to analyzing the effect of the different factors. The three hypotheses concern three of the access goods summarized in Table 1.

2.6.1 Hypothesis on Expert Knowledge

Expert knowledge in any policy area is of relevance to the European Commission as it is drafting legislation. As has been argued, stakeholders have more in-depth knowledge of the area in which it operates than the Commission with its overall broader policy scope. For specific policy areas concerning the internal market, this should be true of both EU and non-EU interest groups. As a novel example, it is reasonable to assume that interest groups representing beekeepers both inside and outside of the EU could have converging views on what is regarded as appropriate conditions for fruitful production of honey.

On the other hand, as the European Union seeks legislative harmonization across its member states, it could be possible that expert knowledge coming from groups inside the European Union warrants some sort of ‘insider’ credibility. Potentially this could speak in favor of intra-EU interest groups being favored above interest groups coming from the outside.

Nonetheless, expert knowledge in a specific area need not be constricted to insider stakeholders. As such, it is possible to assess expert knowledge from both types of groups to benefit the Commission in its process of creating a policy. The hypothesis is formulated as such:

H₁: Companies from the EU member states and non-EU countries have equal levels of access to the European Commission.

2.6.2 Hypothesis on public support as access good

Reviewing theory on interest group research, multiple access goods have been identified. In addition to the early established goods expert knowledge, Bouwen introduced information on Domestic and European Encompassing interests. Relating to the discussion of interest group activities concerned with outsider strategies, public support has been introduced as an additional access good.

Returning to the Commission role of legislative initiative, it is necessary to gain support in the legislative branch of the EU political system. This translates into support of the Parliament and the Council, respectively representing EU citizens and EU governments. It is considered advantageous to have the backing of these principal populations, namely that of EU citizens and within domestic electorates.

Interest groups concerned with engaging a wider audience and winning over public opinion, is therefore equipped with a potentially influential tool for which the Commission is seeking to make use of. Keeping in mind the scope of mobilizing public opinion, extra- and intra-EU interest groups engage different populations. Interest groups operating within the EU (and/or within domestic arenas) would therefore present a greater asset or liability to support of the Commission's proposal.

Imagining that an interest group is able to mobilize public opinion in favor of a given policy proposal, the Commission would be interested in capitalizing on this approval and include the IG in the process by granting recognition and access. Returning to the related institutions, the EP and the Council is in some respect the materialization of public opinion of the individual member states.

As public opinion of countries outside the EU does not affect the pressure of MEPs and Council represented by governments, we are able to draw an assumption of differentiated relevance between public support/disapproval. Public support as an access good is assumed to be of greater importance when coming from an intra-EU interest group, resulting in the following hypothesis:

H₂: Non-governmental organizations from within the EU is granted access to a greater degree than equivalent interest groups from outside the EU.

2.6.3 Hypothesis on Information on Domestic Encompassing Interest

The interdependent relationship of resource exchange between private and public actors has been established as necessary for the sustained survival and relevance of the public institutions. The generality of the institutions by their very nature presents the need for area-specific information which can only be provided by actors operating in the market.

It has become clear that associations, with their ability to aggregate interests within an industry sector of a country, are important in conveying needs and concerns to the table when conducting lobbying activities. In terms of legitimacy, associations can come across as carriers of more nuanced positions taking into account the diversity of its members. For national associations, this manifests itself in Information on the Domestic Encompassing Interest.

Bringing in the context of national associations from outside and inside the EU, there is reason to believe that domestic concerns of EU national associations carry more weight than concerns of national associations from outside the EU. Following this reasoning, we are able to produce a hypothesis formulated as:

H₃: Trade and business associations from inside the EU experience a higher degree of access than non-EU corresponding national associations.

3. Data and research design

This chapter has a two-fold purpose, by presenting the data and methodological approach to the analysis that were conducted. Firstly, the data sources are explained and discussed, from which the data set is compiled. Excluded countries are accounted for, in addition to illustrations of Norway as a country case within the EU interest group sphere. Explanations are given for the selection and operationalization of the dependent variable on access, independent variables, and control variables. Descriptive statistics are provided for the different variables.

Secondly, the last part of the chapter describes the methodological approach to analysis. It focuses on the method of working with count data, and the avenues explored before arriving at negative binomial regression as the appropriate method for analysis.

3.1. Data

Crucial to any research question is the data upon which investigation is to be conducted, and subsequently the way this data is prepared for analysis (de Vaus 2002, 1). This also makes the provision of data important for the thesis. The research question arose from an interest in interest groups in the EU, with an initial idea of identifying differences between groups from inside and outside the Union in terms of access.

EU interest group literature underscores the importance of access (Lelieveldt and Princen 2015, 43). As this chapter will give reasons for, access is in the thesis operationalized as interest group meetings with EC officials. As interest group access research has progressed, Beyers highlights the need for combining data from both sides of the relationship. The relationship is as argued by Bouwen to be construed as interdependent, and Binderkrantz & Pedersen provided a useful definition of when access is granted. Beyers' argument is that the two-sided approach is necessary in order to investigate the gatekeeper role and second step of the access process in addition to the interest group perspective (2017, 320).

The data used in this thesis is gathered from LobbyFacts (LF), a joint project of Corporate Europe Observatory and LobbyControl. LF provides an overview of interest groups aiming their efforts toward EU institutions. The data base contains information that is made openly available to the public (LobbyFacts 2021a). The data base is produced by collating information

from two official sources, and with regards to the thesis it is considered to be in line with Beyers' encouragement of 'dual data'. The basis for the LF data base is entries in the EU Transparency Register (TR), which has become a common data source in EU interest group literature. As TR data is widely used in interest group literature, it was explored as a possibly relevant information source for the thesis concerning interest group activity in the EU with an essential membership effect.

TR relies on self-report data by the registrants, and updating information needs to happen at least yearly. Reporting is required from all organizations that interact with the institutions, pertaining to groups "with the objective of influencing the decision-making and policy implementation processes" (Joint Transparency Registry Secretariat 2020a, 3). While registering formally is voluntary, decision-makers in practice do not meet with non-registered groups. Informally, this makes the TR de facto mandatory (Bunea and Gross 2019, 800). The TR provides substantial amounts of information on organizations and individuals such as date of registration, sector of operation, country of origin, number of persons involved, and number of EP entry passes (Transparency Register 2021). As of 21 July 2021 there were 12,783 entries in the TR (European Commission 2021f).

The TR data base made available by LF is one of many sources on interest group activity, where ultimately the specific research approach dictates different requirements for data collection (Moses and Knutsen 2012, 3). Keeping in mind the desire to measure access, the LF data base is relevant for the thesis as it is supplemented with data on the EC's high-level official meetings with interest groups. The data includes meetings with commissioners, cabinet members and directors-general. This data is extracted from the EC's websites and assigned within TR registered interest groups (LobbyFacts 2021a). The EC openly publishes calendars providing an overview of Commissioner meetings, including those held with interest groups (European Commission 2021a).

The EC meetings data in the LF data base is thus essential as it includes the dependent variable of the analysis, for which the interest groups hypotheses expect access to be affected by membership. LF data only summarizes meetings data for the interest groups and does not provide the option of breaking it down on executive level within the EC nor time. Transparency International EU (TIE) is similarly to LF a transparency group advocating stakeholder openness. Their online platform delivers a tool with the option to explore disaggregated data

on individual meetings, both which officials any TR registered IG has met with in addition to when the meeting(s) took place (Transparency International EU 2021). Although these data characteristics are considered useful, the TIE platform lacks the possibility to extract the data base and the exhaustive information on individual interest group level, such as lobbying costs and number of lobbyists involved in the activities.

Without the exception of the accessible commissioner meetings calendars published on the EC's website, verifying the LF data base meetings is a difficult exercise. The unassessed risk of error is as such present in both EC archiving practices as well as within the transfer to the LF data base, but this uncertainty is not considered a violation of data reliability. Given the similar goals of LF and TIE, both organizations provide useful information on the two sources interest groups in TR and meeting data. With the arguments above, LobbyFacts is considered the most appropriate data source, their data base is used to create the data set.

3.1.1 Case selection

Assessing the quality of data beyond the academic measurements that will follow in this chapter might therefore be a challenge. Because the dataset is a replica of TR records and EC meeting entries, it is subject to inaccuracies and flaws that may have occurred in the original source (LobbyFacts 2021a). LF data has however already been used in several academic works. Of recent, both Chalmers & Macedo (2020, 7) and Biguri & Stahl (2020, 3) relied on LF data for inclusion of organization expenditure in their research.

While this thesis posits an argument related to interest group origin rather than interest group characteristics, observing the use of the LF data base produces confidence in the dataset as a reliable source of information. This does not, however, indicate that accuracy should automatically be taken for granted. The risk of error is as such still present, also being true for the process of treating the data once extracted from the data base.

As has been established, the data set includes information from two sources: organization characteristics from the TR and number of meetings with the EC from their websites. In general, the more evidence (data) that is gathered, the stronger any potential inference will be (Gerring 2012, 88). Ahead of selecting relevant types of groups, which will be discussed under

independent variables, the collated data set consisted of a total of 12,526 groups and 32,523 conducted meetings. In terms of quantitative methods, this is considered a large sample.

The relatively high number of observations in the present dataset does not automatically provide a reliable basis for synthesizing relationships between public and private actors in the EU sphere. The quantitative method does, however, by its nature enable a representative overview of interest group characteristics on a large number of data objects (Grønmo 2016, 357). Not only is the data collection process a critical juncture in terms of enabling trustworthy findings based on variables, but also the following steps by preparing data for analysis requires meticulous and conscious decisions to be made. The following subchapter explains choices made in case selection, including an explanation for the decision to leave certain countries out of the data set.

3.1.1.1 Excluded cases

The data set was initially explored with the ambition of making decisions on relevant cases, in this case countries with registered groups to be included in the analysis. The cases included in the study must in some respect be representative of a larger population (Gerring 2008, 675). The RQ asks whether EU membership has an effect on interest group access, demanding the inclusion of both countries that are members of the EU and countries that are not. This requirement is met by the LF data base, as the TR guidelines applies to interest groups regardless of origin. The use of this crucial information is described in subchapter 3.1.3.2 (EU membership).

From the outset, the case selection was reversed, meaning the process as opposed to being about inclusion of cases became questions about exclusion. During the exploration, two cases raised concern as they on different merits could be considered deviant from the other countries in the data set. Belgium is argued to constitute an unusual case, while the United Kingdom (UK) brings with it certain statistical concerns. The numbers presented for Belgium and the UK in Table 2 are only valid for the three chosen types of IGs, further explained in subchapter 3.1.3.1 (interest group type). For sake of precision, these are here referred to as “relevant groups”.

The United Kingdom has since the introduction of the TR left the EU, commonly referred to as Brexit (European Commission 2021c). In the period following the 2016 referendum until the

finalization of Brexit on 31 January 2020, the disentangling of the UK’s relationship with the EU paved the way for questions on future UK interest representation in the EU. Coen and Katsaitis argues that previous interest access will be diminished, and in particular stressed the loss of access for business interests (2021b, 45). These interests accompanied by major UK interest groups were in favor of remaining in the Union (M.D. Jensen and Snaith 2016, 1304-1305).

The uncertainty of future UK interest representation struck in a period where the UK was negotiating (internally and externally) their future relationship with the EU (Hix 2018, 12). In practice, this left the now-former MS ‘partially out’ of the union. While the number of UK relevant interest groups (*n* 717) comprise a valuable contribution to the data set, an inclusion is considered problematic. On one hand, UK groups were in fact EU groups until January 2020. On the other hand, they were already partially outside of the EU resulting from the uncertainty about the future relationship. For interest groups, this uncertainty put them in limbo when not knowing what the lobbying landscape would look like after Brexit (De Ville and Siles-Brügge 2019, 2). As a precautionary measure, the United Kingdom was as such excluded from the data set.

	United Kingdom	Belgium
Associations	210	700
Companies	255	148
NGOs	252	740
Total	717	1588

Table 2: BE and UK interest groups

Brussels is the de facto capital of the EU, with a distance to MS capitals that Moravcsik relays as the construction of a ‘remote capital’ (2001, 114). By interpreting Rokkan’s territorial dimension in which power lies in the center, it is not controversial to expect a desired proximity to Brussels and the EU institutions (Aarebrot and Evjen 2014, 30). The territorial dimension of the EU does however extend the Union’s border, as e.g., big tech companies have added resources to the EU capital activities as a consequence of the ‘Brussels effect’ (Bradford 2020, 254). There is also the case of EFTA EEA countries adhering to certain EU law, while being ‘further’ from the capital than member states as discussed in subchapter 3.1.5.

The raw data corroborates the Brussels proximity assumption, given that there are 1588 relevant groups registered in Belgium, making it the biggest country in the LF data base. If economic magnitude were an indication, we observe that Belgium has only the 10th highest GDP in the EU (Eurostat 2021). In comparison, Germany as the EU's biggest economy has a total of 1247 groups. This suggests that the number of Belgian groups could be inflated, at least in part due to the country making up the vicinity of many EU institutions.

One explanation directly related to the proximity is the provenance of EU-level associations, attracting lobbyists to locate in the EU capital (Mahoney 2008, 1). These interest groups are thought to have stronger representational capacity compared to national associations (Berkhout, Hanegraaff, and Braun 2017, 1126). Examples of such associations are the European enterprises confederation BusinessEurope, European Steel Association, and electricity industry association EURELECTRIC. As the geographical center of the EU, such organizations find it useful to be close to the center and potentially take part in the legislative processes of policies concerning these EU-level associations (van Schendelen 2010, 134).

Excluding the Belgian EU-level associations requires dropping all relevant interest groups registered in Belgium, including entries within the three selected interest group types operating at the national level. One way to circumvent this issue could be by evaluating each Belgian group and determine the level on which they operate. While possibly rewarding in terms of findings and therefore considered, it was considered unhelpful from a resource perspective and therefore deserted. Belgium was a result excluded from the data set.

3.1.2 Dependent variable

Operationalization of the phenomenon that is influenced by other factors is referred to as the dependent variable. It can be a grouping of attributes, but as a minimum it needs to demarcate the boundaries of the phenomenon (Gerring 2012, 130). The aim of the thesis is to investigate the possibility of EU membership affecting access to the EU institutions. As was described in the theory chapter, measuring interest group influence is a challenging task, and parts of interest group literature has therefore turned to access as a useful tool in this regard (Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2017, 307). Additionally, as the EU constitutes a multilevel political system, entry points for access are numerous (Richardson 2000, 1013).

Given the European Commission's role in agenda-setting and legislative initiative, it is considered an institution that is prone to attempted influence and therefore a potentially useful institution to gain access to (Princen 2007, 23). As argued by Dür and Mateo, insiders have better access to bureaucrats and executive institutions than outsiders (2016, 17). Related to Bouwen's theoretical framework, insiders acquire this access by providing the public actor in question with useful information, i.e., access goods.

Being reminded of the distinction between insider and outsider strategies of interest groups engaging in lobbying activities, access is mostly concerned with the prior strategy type. For outsiders, public support has been introduced as an additional access good. Access has previously been defined as a two-step process in which both an actor needs to seek access and the institution in question need to grant it. The hypotheses center around interest group meeting activity with the EC, which prerequisites a measure on the access given in meetings. The dependent variable *meetings* counts the number of high-level official meetings interest groups in the LF data base have conducted with EC officials. While searches for interest group's appearances in official documents (herein meeting records) provides a way to monitor interest group access to the EC, a weakness of this approach is the limited ability by comparing only 'access that leaves tracks' (Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2017, 316).

While 'trackless' access should not be ruled out, there are regulations in place seeking to avoid it. EC high-level executives must therefore meet only interest representatives that are listed in the TR, according to the EC's transparency policy (European Commission 2021d). Commissioners are obligated to register meetings with interest representatives and make the information available (European Commission 2020, 5). As previously mentioned, LF extracts the meetings data from the EC webpages, and matches the involved lobbyists with data from the TR. The dataset contains all meetings since the EC started publishing meeting information online on 1 December 2014. While attendance is reported by the EC, LF omits meetings with Heads of Service (LobbyFacts 2021c).

In addition to the idea of interest groups seeking and receiving access in the definition of access by Binderkrantz and Pedersen, their conceptual understanding transfers the concept away from its dichotomous state and considers access as a continuous phenomenon (Binderkrantz, Christiansen, and Pedersen 2020, 291). In addition to explaining 'access or not', the meetings count intuitively tells us how much access has been given.

The data set contains a total of 14,923 meetings. Of the 6512 groups, 68,5 % have no registered meetings with the EC (n 4460). Due to the disproportionate spread of values, the median value is 0. The average number of meetings for the 6512 interest groups is 2.3, a metric already far more enlightening than ‘access or no access’. As lobbying goes, although gaining access by meeting with the EC is assumed to be coveted by groups, it is evident that most groups are not able to get in the door at all. Another explanation might of course be that not all groups seek the access others are working for, referring to insider/outsider distinction between types of groups. This will be discussed in the independent variable *type*.

Figure 1 shows a histogram of interest groups meetings with the EC in ranges. The chart applies the different interest group types identified under subchapter 3.1.3.1. As an effort toward provide a visual representation of the skewed meetings distribution while simultaneously ensuring an illustrative effect of the chart in the thesis, custom ranges were created.³ As is illustrated by the chart, the most prevalent occurrence is 0, and the 4460 IGs with no meetings are made up by 1246 associations, 1371 companies, and 1843 NGOs.

In the range 1-4 meetings there are 1414 groups, equivalent to 32 % of the groups with no meetings. The number of groups drop consecutively for each IG type until the 25-49 range, partly due to its larger span. This particular distribution of meeting values is further problematized in subchapter 3.2 when discussing appropriate methodological approach for analysis. **Feil! Fant ikke referansekilden.**

³ Frequency for the histogram ranges provided in appendix A.

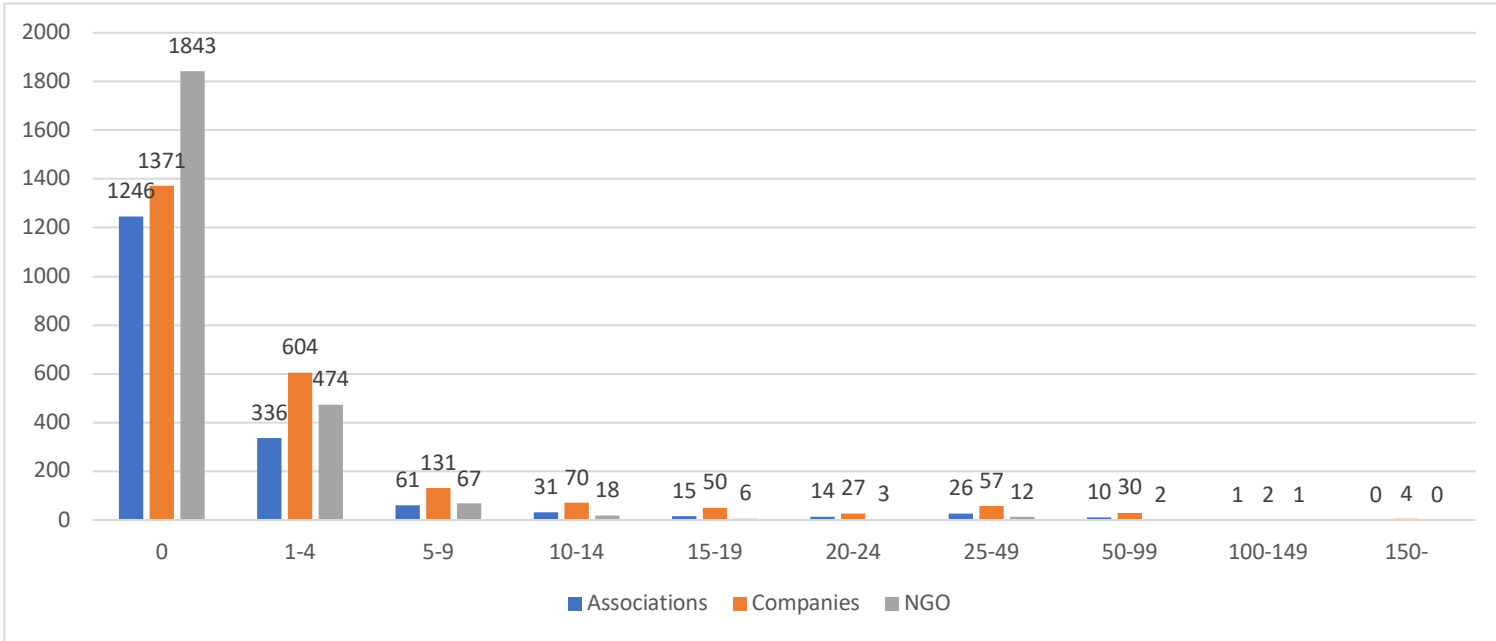


Figure 1: Meetings in ranges by interest group type
 Source: LobbyFacts data set. Note: unstandardized ranges.

3.1.2.1 Example cases – Who has had the “most access”?

From the previous subchapter, it is apparent that in terms of meeting with the EC, the norm is actually *not* meeting with high-level officials in the European Commission. This begs the question: who are the ones being let in the door, and who are the ones that are kept being invited in? The total range of meetings is 0-273, where the max value refers to the number of meetings Google (US) has held with the EC. Sorting the data set by number of meetings reveals 8 groups with more than 100 meetings, as seen in Table 3.

In this table we find additional familiar multinational companies (MNCs) such as Facebook and Microsoft, well known for the average citizen. Google, Microsoft, and IBM Corporation are the only non-EU groups on the list. By further inspection, both Facebook and Amazon originate in the US, although represented in the TR with their EU addresses. The three mentioned non-EU groups are as such the only de facto groups originating outside the EU. In Amazon’s case, the entry lists a Luxembourgish subsidiary of the US corporation in charge of EU operations. Facebook’s TR entry listed under Ireland is well known, and is expected to be a result of both financial and strategic considerations (Kalyanpur and Newman 2019, 460). The potential EU affiliation implications will be further discussed under the independent variable *EU membership*.

	Group	Country⁴	EU	Costs	Meetings	Years in TR	Type
1	Google	US	No	€ 5 875 000	273	10,2	Company
2	Airbus	NL	Yes	€ 1 875 000	203	12,5	Company
3	Facebook Ireland Limited	IE	Yes	€ 5 625 000	166	9,3	Company
4	Microsoft Corporation	US	No	€ 5 375 000	159	12,4	Company
5	IBM Corporation	US	No	€ 1 875 000	117	12,4	Company
6	Deutsche Telekom	DE	Yes	€ 1 125 000	114	11,5	Company
7	Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e.V.	DE	Yes	€ 2 875 000	114	12,4	Association
8	European Climate Foundation	NL	Yes	€ 750 000	102	12,1	NGO
9	European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations	LU	Yes	€ 5 375 000	95	12,2	Association
10	Amazon Europe Core SARL	LU	Yes	€ 1 875 000	90	6,7	Company

*Table 3: Groups with highest number of meetings
Source: LobbyFacts data base with calculated TR duration.*

Of the 10 groups with the most meetings with the EC, 70 % are companies. Associations and NGOs make up the last 30 % with respectively a 2/1 split. The only NGO represented, European Climate Foundation, is also the only group of the 10 with costs below 1 million euros. The two associations represent accordingly German industries and European pharma, both individual companies and national associations. Without the option of comparing these IG type ratios over time, there are preliminary findings that indicate a rise of corporate lobbying by companies at the expense of other types such as associations (Hanegraaff and Poletti 2021, 14).

Feil! Fant ikke referansekinden. is a good example of the intricacy of EU interest groups environment, here illustrated by the presence of an EU-level association (entry 9). Interest groups operating at this level are predominantly Belgium-based, and most of these have been excluded from the data set. As is discussed in subchapter 3.1.3.1, the chosen interest type groups are expected to consist mostly of national associations.

Keeping in mind the reference to different strategies and emphasis put on ‘getting in the door’, it seems unlikely a goal for all groups to use resources on getting meetings with the EC if these resources are best used elsewhere. Table 3 does however signal that the most access has been (sought and) given to groups that many of us are acquainted with. This of course is due to the fact that they are MNCs producing and producing goods and services which citizens and consumers are most familiar with.

⁴ US: United States, NL: Netherlands, IE: Ireland, DE: Germany, LU: Luxembourg

3.1.2.2 Reliability and validity of the dependent variable

The difference between group and willingness to seek access leads into a broader question of reliability and validity of this measurement; two data quality criteria often mentioned together (Grønmo 2016, 240). The thesis makes use of an openly available data set that is composed of information from the two sources: the Transparency Register and European Commission meetings data. The two sources are combined in the LobbyFacts data base, which serves as the source of data for the thesis. Access has been described as present when interest group 1) seek it, and 2) decision-makers grant it. These two conditions are fulfilled in the description of meetings with high-level EU officials. The dependent variable *meetings* was in subchapter 3.1.2 operationalized to the data on interest group meetings with the EC.

Concerning reliability, one is usually interested in a consistent measure of the concept in question. In this case, two parties are involved: an interest group seeking access and the deciding whether it will grant it by meeting with any individual group. EC officials should meet only meet with registered group in addition to keeping records of their meeting activity. This first EC obligation in practice forces interest groups to register in the TR. While the moral obligations of interest groups to register their presence in the EU sphere contributes to an overview of interest group activity, the legal obligations of the EC make the meetings measure consistent.

Questions for validity are analyzed at two levels: internal and external (Gerring 2012, 84). The latter implies a generalization to the broader population. Keeping in mind the EU's *sui generis* nature, there is no equal to the lobbying environment of the EU. Concerning the three chosen interest group types, the measurement method is equal to those interest group types excluded from the data set. Internal validity within the chosen cases is considered sound, with reference to the description of how meetings are logged by the EC and subsequently used by LF in their data base.

Although there seems to be no justified cause for concern with the precision of the dependent variable, no measure should be considered perfect. Trackless access as described by Binderkrantz and Pedersen is one aspect that problematizes the measurement of access as a concept (2017, 316). Informal business settings, meetings in passing, and relayed information could also be considered access of importance, as described in subchapter 2.2.5. As argued in the theory chapter, access has however become a concept worth exploring in interest group

literature however. With the chosen research design, the chosen operationalization of access as meetings measured by the EC data is evaluated to be valuable.

3.1.3 Independent variables

Independent variables are phenomena assumed to help explain the outcome of the dependent variable. As connoted by their name, they are expected to influence, affect or cause the behavior of the dependent variable (Johnson, Reynolds, and Mycoff 2015, 105). With the RQ at hand, it is necessary to identify those characteristics expected to influence the number of interest group meetings with the EC, based on the theoretical explanations related to informational exchange. This subchapter presents the two independent variables interest group type and EU membership, placing them in the context of the interdependent relationship between public and private actors.

3.1.3.1 *Interest group type*

Inherent to an understanding of interest groups in the EU, is the premise of diverse interest representation that has found its place in a developing EU interest group system (Coen and Richardson 2009, 3). Studies of access enable systematic comparison of bias in the set of groups being represented in certain settings (Binderkrantz and Pedersen 2017, 307). Among the answers such comparisons may provide are variances between interest groups depending on the type of interests they represent.

The LobbyFacts data set mostly mirrors the TR in its distinction between the types of groups. The interest plurality alerts anyone aiming to dive into interest group research and requires both cautious preparation, analysis and interpretation of data and subsequent results. The question's pertinence can be summarized by the following concern: which interest groups are we interested in, and what options do the data offer?

As the hypotheses indicate that different types of groups interact differently with the EC, it is necessary to differentiate between them in the data set. The TR classifies registered groups in 6 sections with a total of 14 subsections (Joint Transparency Registry Secretariat 2020a, 9). Number of entries in the different sections varies greatly, with top three in descending order being “In-house lobbyists and trade/business/professional associations”, “Non-governmental organizations”, and “Think tanks, research and academic institutions”. LF operates with the

same classification of groups, with the only difference being the name of subsection “Other organizations” which is called “Other in-house lobbyists” in their database (LobbyFacts 2021b). Counting “Non-governmental organizations” as a subsection gives a total of 15 subsections, which in the thesis will be referred to as “interest group types”. Table 4 provides an overview.

I - Professional consultancies/law firms/self-employed consultants	1-1 Professional consultancies
	1-2 Law Firms
	1-3 Self-employed consultants
II - In-house lobbyists and trade/business/professional associations	2-1 Companies & groups
	2-2 Trade and business associations
	2-3 Trade unions and professional associations
	2-4 Other organizations
III - Non-governmental organizations	3-1 Non-governmental organizations, platforms and networks and similar
IV - Think tanks, research and academic institutions	4-1 Think tanks and research institutions
	4-2 Academic institutions
V - Organizations representing churches and religious communities	5-1 Organizations representing churches and religious communities
VI - Organizations representing local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.	6-1 Regional structures
	6-2 Other sub-national public authorities
	6-3 Transnational associations and networks of public regional or other sub-national authorities
	6-4 Other public or mixed entities, created by law whose purpose is to act in the public interest

*Table 4: Overview of sections and subsections in the EU Transparency Register
Source: Statistics for the Transparency Register (European Commission 2021e).*

3.1.3.1 Identifying relevant group types

The three hypotheses concern different kinds of interest groups. H_1 expects EU membership not to be of relevance when it comes to providing the access good expert knowledge. According to the framework of access goods, individual companies are the ones able to provide expert knowledge. It is expected that while EU or outside-EU companies are affected by EU policy differently, situation inside the EU does not entail “more expert knowledge” of a certain policy area. This requires the data from subsection *companies and groups*, which include individual companies.

H_2 concerns groups engaging in mobilizing public support as part of their lobbying strategy. The hypothesis expects to see a difference in access between groups from inside and outside the EU. As argued in the theory chapter, mobilization of public support is inherent to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) due to their organizational structure. It is therefore justifiable to include subsection *non-governmental organizations* to the dataset in order to test this hypothesis.

H_3 expects a difference between EU and non-EU associations in their ability to provide IDEI to the EC. Information on domestic implications is expected to be more worth to the EC when this information regards countries within the EU than outside. While the EU has developed into a political structure that has greater policy impact beyond the union borders, it is reasonable to expect EU-domestic impacts to be the vital objective of the EC. As such, the hypothesis expects what is known in TR as *trade and business associations* to contribute with information, and because of the legislative scope it is expected that EU groups are able to provide more useful information than outside-EU groups. This creates a need for inclusion of the abovementioned subsection.

When considering group types for the third hypothesis, a decision was made to leave out “trade unions and professional associations”, as these are expected to capture a significant portion of remaining European level associations left behind after the exclusion of Belgian groups.

A total of three sections and subsections have been identified in the LF data base as the relevant ones for the data set in order to perform adequate analyses. These are 1) companies & groups, 2) trade & business associations, and 3) non-governmental organizations. Of these three classes, two are subsections of the TR section *II – In-house lobbyists and trade/ business/professional*

associations: 2-1 companies and groups, and 2-2 trade and business associations. Section III – *Non-governmental organizations* contains only one subsection which bears the same name. The three subsections will for the purpose of the thesis be referred to by the term interest group type, and only these three groups are included in further description, analysis, and discussion of the data. Table 5 shows the total of included interest groups for each of the three group types.

Interest group type	n	%
Companies & groups	2346	36.0
Trade & business associations	1740	26.7
Non-governmental organizations	2426	37.3
Total	6512	100

Table 5: Overview of interest group types
Source: data set created from LobbyFacts data base

The 2020 TR annual report states that NGOs was the second biggest section in the TR (Joint Transparency Registry Secretariat 2021, 10). Due to the subset of “companies and groups” and “trade and business associations” from the biggest section in the TR, NGOs constitute the biggest type of group in the data set with the extracted interest group types. This latter interest group type accounts for 37.3 % of the total 6512 groups. By applying the TR sections, the two group types companies & groups and trade & business associations make up 62.7 %. The selected group types will be referred to by their three individual names in the following chapters.

3.1.3.2 EU membership

The internationalization of policy-making has resulted in an increasing number of decisions being shifted from national to supranational institutions, as is also evident in the EU (Klüver 2013, 213). While a European interest group might be international in the sense that it operates in several countries and/or outside the EU (e.g. aerospace corporation Airbus), interests originating from outside the Union have also intensified their EU efforts.

The effect of membership on influence is previously explored in the literature, but as discussed in subchapters 2.3 and 2.4 are the consequences of (lacking) membership yet to be revealed. As the research question centers around on this potential difference in access between interest groups coming from inside and outside the European Union, it is necessary to operationalize

inside- or outside-EU status. This measure describes whether a group is considered an EU group.

A membership variable was added (*EU*). The dichotomous variable tells us whether a group's home office is inside (1) or outside (0) the European Union. A big majority of registry entries are inside-EU groups, accounting for 85 % of the total 6512 groups as seen in Table 6. There are 26 EU member states whose groups are coded 1, and 86 non-EU countries with groups in the data set⁵. This gives a total of 112 countries (Appendix B).

<i>Type/EU</i>	Trade & business associations	Companies & groups	Non-governmental organizations	
Non-EU	234	397	341	972
EU	1506	1949	2085	5540
Total	1740	2346	2426	6512

Table 6: Number of EU/non-EU groups based on type

The table demonstrates the relationship between inside- and outside-EU groups within the different interest group types. The overall mean of 85 % above is not far from either of the three types, ranging from 83 % (companies) and 87 % (associations). None of the interest group types seem to stand out when it comes to over or underrepresentation of EU or non-EU groups.

This variable further allows a comparison between EU and non-EU countries' groups. An overview of the 30 biggest countries is represented in Table 7. Of the countries in the table, 26 are EU member states. The non-EU country with the highest number of interest groups is the United States, listed as the 6th largest country with 384 registered groups. Switzerland follows behind as the next biggest non-EU country with its 234 interest groups.

⁵ Belgium and the United Kingdom have been excluded, see subchapter 3.1.1.1.

Germany	1247	Poland	185	Hungary	59
France	684	Ireland	162	Slovenia	56
Netherlands	580	Denmark	153	Estonia	48
Spain	559	Portugal	124	Slovakia	43
Italy	489	Greece	101	Croatia	42
United States	384	Czech Republic	82	Canada	40
Switzerland	234	Romania	73	Lithuania	38
Sweden	215	Luxembourg	67	Cyprus	25
Austria	205	Norway	61	Malta	23
Finland	199	Bulgaria	60	Latvia	21

Table 7: Top 30 countries by registered interest groups

While the need for an EU variable has been established, this inclusion benefits from the mentioning of complicating factors touched on in the *interest group type* variable. As was seen in Table 3, 7 out of the 10 biggest groups with the most meetings are listed as EU groups. With the examples such as Facebook and Amazon with their EU subsidiaries, it became clear that while legally registered as EU groups, IGs registered in the TR may originate elsewhere. Per the TR guidelines, the “single entry principle” encourages the company’s entity whose activities are aimed at the EU institutions to cover the corporate group under their listing (Joint Transparency Registry Secretariat 2020b, 8). There is no easy maneuver to account for this in the data set, albeit serving as a reminder of the complexity of the interest group environment.

3.1.4 Control variables

The effect of other phenomena may be introduced in addition to the independent variables described above, to better comprehend the relationship between interest group characteristics and the dependent variable. The purpose of introducing these controls in the regression is not to destroy an observed relationship, but to see whether it can be destroyed by controlling for a variable that has been argued to have theoretical bearing on the relationship in question (Gordon 1968, 593). While control variables may shed light on the validity of causal relationships, uncritical inclusion of such variables should be avoided (Clarke 2009, 46-47).

One should therefore never assume that a research design includes all variables necessary to recreate the real environment of observation, but efforts can be made to shine as much light on the phenomenon as possible within theoretical reason. This section of the data and research design chapter presents three control variables drawn from the same LF data base: time in the

Transparency register, reported lobbying costs, and number of employees involved with lobbying activities. The subchapter explains these variables and justifies their presence in the analysis, with reference to existing interest group literature.

3.1.4.1 *Time in the Transparency Register*

As the *meetings* variable counts the total of meetings a group has held with the EC since the beginning of logging meetings, there is need for a control variable that adjusts for the amount of time since registration. This is intended to resolve the time bias towards groups that because of the time passed since registration may have been given access and opportunity to round up a significantly higher number of meetings than more recently registered groups. Even though meeting records do not go further back than 2014, the early presence could be expected to have a positive effect on ensuing access simply by acknowledging experience as a relevant factor for interest groups.

All entries in the LF database provide the date of an organization/group's registration corresponding with the TR. The dataset was reloaded on the 20 May 2021, to include any new entries since the research design was developed and initial data set was created. This date was set as the cut-off date and then used to calculate the number of days between date of registration in the TR and 20 May 2021. The output gives each registry listing a numeric value representing a certain number of days. The number of days have been rounded for all entries. Because off the identical cut-off date all decimals are equal, and there is no distortion of the values with implications for the analysis.

A summary of the variable reveals the first entry in the register to be on 23 June 2008 and the last entry on 9 May 2021. Before establishing the TR in 2014, interest groups were able to register voluntarily in an EC register of lobbyists that opened for registrations from the June date above (European Parliament 2014, 3; European Commission 2008). The first group to register was the Spain-registered company Telefonica, S.A., which was followed by 672 registered groups in 2008. The mean registration is 15 July 2016, giving the average interest group 1609 days in the TR since registration. Further descriptive data on registration and duration is presented in Table 8.

Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max
2008-06-23	2014-05-05	2016-12-19	2016-07-15	2019-09-11	2021-05-09
Max.	3rd Qu.	Median	Mean	1st Qu.	Min.
4714	2288	1609	1609	526	11

Table 8: Overview of group TR registration/duration⁶

There has been a rapid yearly increase of entries in the TR, which is in line with the growing number of policy areas in the EU and corresponding interest group diversity. Figure 2 shows the development from 673 registered groups in 2008 to 6512, with the last entry on 9 May ahead at the cut-off date.

These numbers represent only the interest group types and countries deemed appropriate for inclusion in the data set: companies & groups, trade & business associations, and NGOs. For the three groups combined there was a more rapid increase of registrations ahead of the TR being set up. Following the TR, the curve has flattened since 2014. An interpretation of this development is a decreasing population of unregistered interest groups while new ones are registered.

⁶ Min/max values and quantiles are reversed for easier comparison.

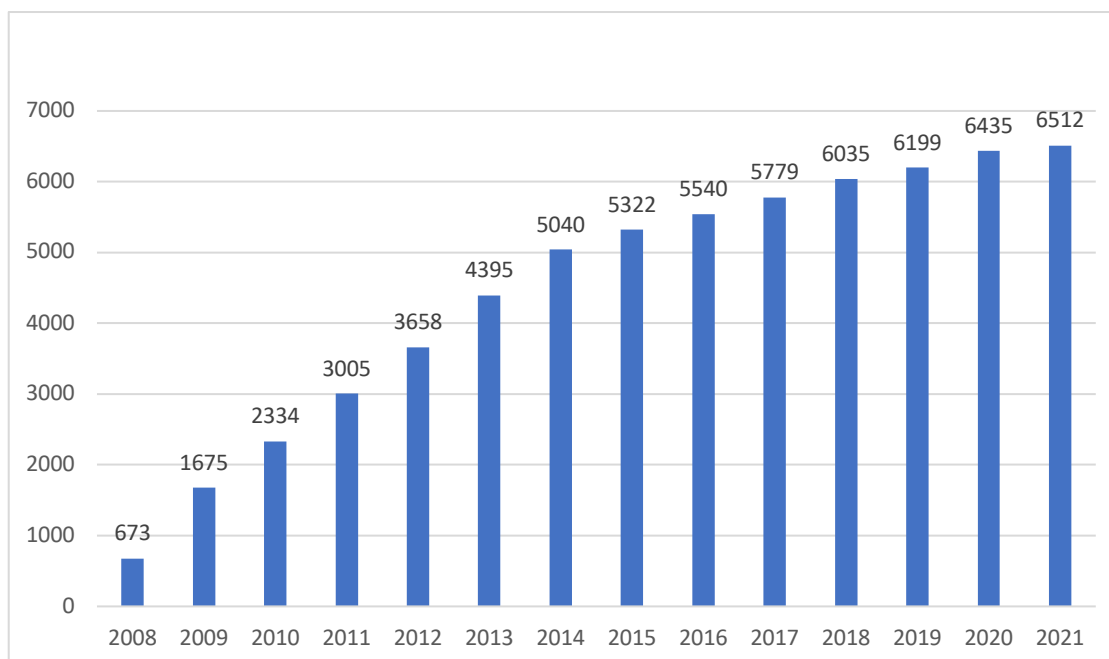


Figure 2: Cumulative total of TR entries for selected group types

3.1.4.2 Lobbying costs

Another appreciated contribution by Stein Rokkan to the field of comparative politics is the famous quote “votes count, but resources decide” (Rommetvedt 2005, 1). While he was referring to the case of Norway, it is hard to conceive of resources as irrelevant in interest group terms. It is also found to matter in an EU context, and has a consistent positive effect for getting access (Albareda and Braun 2019, 479).

As part of the self-reporting of data, TR entries reports an amount in Euros spent on lobbying costs. This number is an estimate of a group’s expenses, including staff, office and administrative expenses, memberships etc. (Dionigi and Martens 2016, 1). Broad interpretation of the Joint Transparency Register Secretariat (JTRS) guidelines on reporting caused the registered amounts to be of differing qualities. Both implausible entries (too high or too low) and data entry errors were pointed to as causes (Greenwood and Dreger 2013, 151). From a theoretical perspective, these numbers could nonetheless be of relevance as firms in particular have increasingly allocated resources towards their EU lobbying activities (Coen 2009, 164).

As of the reporting period for 2020, the section on financial information was changed in order to provide the opportunity to report the amount as a range rather than absolute amounts (Joint Transparency Registry Secretariat 2021, 17). The current cost entries in the LF data base therefore includes both specific amounts and ranges. The variable *costs* was created by recoding

the values in the LF data base, where changes are only made to groups reporting value range. Groups that have reported a range were assigned a numeric value equal to the mean of the lowest amount and the highest amount in that same interval.

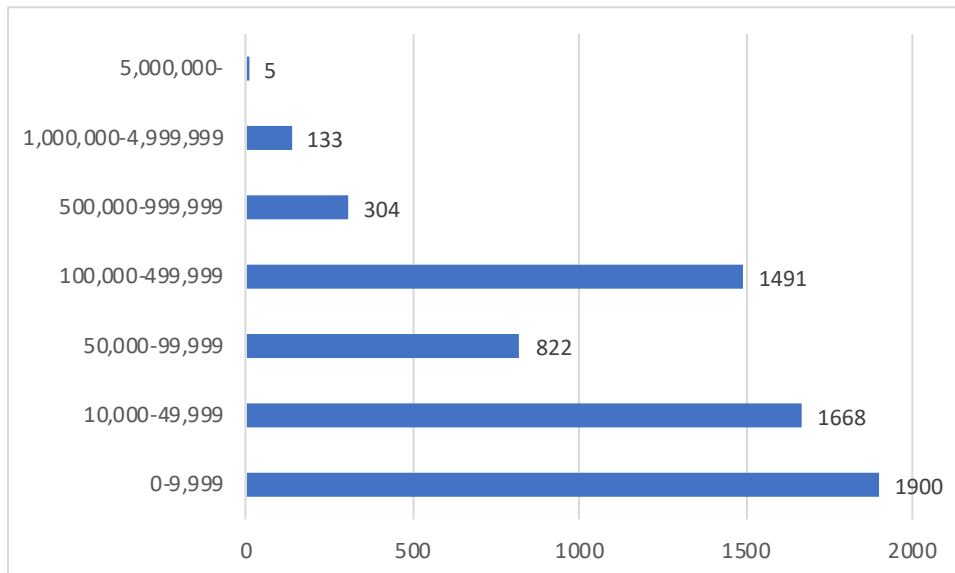


Figure 3: Group spending in ranges
Note: values in Euros.

There are 189 groups in the data set with no reported figure (NAs), which is considered a small portion of the total 6512 groups (2.9 %). Figure 3 illustrates group spending divided in ranges. Most of the interest groups in the data set spend up to 9,999 €, reported by 1900 of the selected TR entries. By looking at the two lowest ranges, with reported spending up to 49,999 €, more than half of the groups are accounted for (54.8 %). The uneven ranges make renders the chart itself rather useless for any statistical inference, but it gives an idea of the concentration of spending. The range starting at 5 million Euros has five groups, including two non-EU groups. Both of these are registered in the US: Google and Microsoft Corporation. Three of the top five in terms of costs are companies. Regardless of type, these must be considered interest groups with vast resources.

If a group in 2019 reports 100,000 € and in 2020 that amount has increased to 200,000 €, their spending has doubled and the increase must be considered a substantial one. A group spending 1,000,000 € reporting the same absolute increase the next year has only a ten percent increase. It is therefore a misstep to compare the costs across ranges without further adjustments. This relativity in the variable benefits from a logarithmic scale (Richter, Samphantharak, and Timmons 2009, 897). To account for this difference, the log of costs has been calculated to

normalize the data. By making the variable *costs* into a logarithmic scale of ratios there is a proportionate relation between any two numbers a given distance apart on the scale (Field 1917, 808-809).

3.1.4.2 Number of employees working with TR activities

As alluded to within the subchapter on lobbying costs, the number of reported costs covers a variety of expenses carried by interest groups in relation to their efforts. One facet of these expenditures is the number of people involved with activities of lobbying, as laid out in the IIA. The impact of resources on lobbying efforts and resultant influence has been investigated with great vigor.

It is not uncommon for organizations to have dedicated policy workers aimed at lobbying institutions and decision-makers, particularly for business interests. In addition to allocated resources making this committed work possible, Klüver argues that professionalization of interest groups in the EU allowed employees to become experts within their fields. Seen in relation to the informational supply, she found that interest groups having a large amount of resources on average provide more information to the EC than those groups that have less resources (Klüver 2012, 505).

In some respect, the inclusion of an employee variable personifies the costs of an interest group; allowing observers to put a face to the costs. This information was included in the data set by creating an employee variable called *FTE*. The reason for this being the term FTE used as a measure of the number of persons in a full-time equivalent (FTE). This is a standard accounting unit used to measure the number of persons working in areas covered by the TR. The FTE is reported as “the average number of hours worked by a given employee as a fraction of the average number of hours worked by a full-time employee” (Joint Transparency Registry Secretariat 2020b, 17). An IG reporting one FTE as such corresponds to one full-time employee.

As an example, Norwegian conglomerate Orkla (type: company) has reported an FTE of 1.75. An example of their FTE could therefore be one employee working full-time with lobbying efforts, while another employee is working 75 % with lobbying. There are however big disparities in Europe between what is equivalent to a full-time employee, as the number of hours in a work week differs between countries (Eurostat 2020b). Considering the Norwegian

example of Orkla above with 1.75 FTE, one can assume a standard 37,5 hours/week which gives 65,6 hours. Belgium, on the other hand, has a higher number of hours per week for full-time employees, and the same FTE for a Belgian group could be assumed to cover a higher number of hours.

Similar to the other variables, there is an unsurprisingly big difference between the 6512 groups in the data set in terms of FTEs. Table Table 9 shows a summary of the variable. The lowest value is 0.25 FTE, and this number is reported by 1712 groups. Using the Belgian FTE conversion of a 40-hour work week in the TR guidelines, this means that 26.3 % of the groups in the data set have reported 10 hours per week going towards TR activities.

On the other end of the scale, it is observed that the maximum value of *FTE* is 40. This number is reported by the British Irish Chamber of Commerce (type: association). Associations and NGOs are well-represented at the top of the FTE ranking, making up 9 out of the 10 highest FTEs (2 and 7, respectively). The highest-ranked company when sorted by FTE is the French fintech company HeoH with a reported full-time equivalent of 27.

Min.	1st quartile	Median	Mean	3rd quartile	Max.
0.25	0.25	1.00	1.71	2.00	40.00

Table 9: Descriptive statistics of FTE variable

Among the non-EU groups, United States registered The Pew Charitable Trusts ranks highest with an FTE at 33. For EFTA EEA states, Liechtenstein-based NGO Commission Internationale pour la Prot ection des Alpes has the highest FTE (11.25). Norway has the energy company Nord Pool European Market Coupling Operator AS and finance industry organization Finance Norway on top with 8.25 FTE.

A caveat is the inherent inaccuracy of this measure, as the FTE is expected to change rapidly as more/less activity is aimed at lobbying. The leeway given TR registrants in the guidelines is evident in the JTRS description of calculating the number for each individual group. Groups are however advised to update their FTE if the number falls or increases by 25 % or more.

3.1.5 The case of Norway

In an effort to put the non-EU interest groups into perspective, some descriptive statistics are provided on the domestic level. An interesting case in this regard is that of Norway, whose relationship with the EU is elegantly summarized in the 2012 Official Norwegian Report title “outside and inside” (NOU 2012:2). Norway’s access to the ESM through the EEA agreement has made the country politically dependent of the EU, and access for Norwegian business and societal interests (Rye 2019, 213).

Recalling the theory chapter, a substantial amount of Norwegian exports go to the EU. Either as the final destination or via the ESM for further processing, e.g. as is the case for the fishing industry (Statistics Norway 2020). As a country dependent on market access, Norwegian interest groups are familiar to lobbying the EU institutions

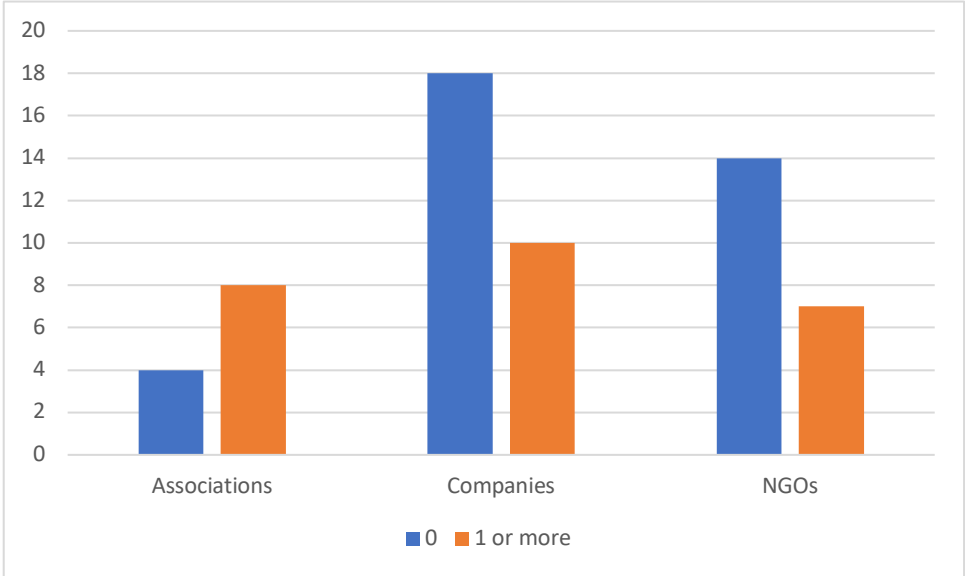


Figure 4: Norwegian groups and meetings based on type

There are 61 groups registered in Norway in the data set, making it the third largest non-EU country. With 12 associations, 28 companies and 21 NGOs, the country’s groups cover a range of interests. From the more prominent energy and petroleum companies Statkraft, Equinor and Agder Energi, visible associations such as the Norwegian Cancer Society and Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, to a varying extent of familiar NGOs such as Bellona Europa and the Norwegian Consumer Council. Norwegian State Enterprises are also found on the list, such as the power grid enterprise Statnett and railway network company Bane Nor.

By looking at the variety of groups, associations and companies stand out with their respective lower and higher proportion compared to the TR data set with the three types. 19 % are associations (TR 26 %) and companies & groups make up a total of 45 % of Norwegian groups (TR 36 %). These 61 groups have in the period from 2014 to the cut-off date had a total of 185 meetings with the EC, a majority of which were carried out by companies (80 %). Figure 4 shows that 36 IGs have had no meetings (59 %), and only every third NGO has had meetings with the EC. Associations has a reversed spread, wherein every third group has *not* had any meetings.

3.1.6. Summary of data selection and variables

Table 10 gives an overview of the variables included in the data set. In addition to the dependent variable *meetings*, two variables were identified and added to the data set in order to purposefully investigate the question of an EU membership effect: *EU membership* and *interest group type*. The latter was selected based on literature suggesting that different interest group types provide decision-makers different types of access goods, which in turn may affect degree of access. The theory chapter identified a gap in EU interest group literature pertaining to an EU membership effect, which created the need to operationalize groups originating from inside or outside the Union. This resulted in a dichotomous EU membership variable.

There are three variables that have been argued as valuable in relation to the interest group literature, while not speaking directly to the research question and aim of the thesis. Consequently, the three variables *time in TR*, *lobbying costs*, and *number of employees (FTE)* were added to the regression as control variables.

During the exploration phase of the LF data base from which the data set is created, two cases were identified as problematic: the two countries Belgium and the United Kingdom. For individual reasons these countries were the only ones excluded from the data set. In summation: the completed data set contains 14,923 observations on the dependent variable *meetings*, 6,512 interest groups 112 countries, supplemented by the three continuous control variables.

Variable	Variable description	Coding	Coding details	Mean/Standard deviation	Source
<i>Meetings</i>	Number of meetings with the European Commission	0 - 273	-	2.3 / 9.2	EC via LF
<i>EU</i>	Member of the European Union	0 / 1	0: not EU member 1: EU member	0.85 / 0.36	TR via LF
<i>Type</i>	Interest group type	NGOs Companies Associations	Categoric	-	TR via LF
<i>Time</i>	Number of days since registration in EU Transparency Register	0 - 4714	Cut-off date 20 May 2021	1770/1311.14	TR via LF
<i>Costs (log)</i>	Reported annual costs to lobbying efforts	0 - 10,000,000 0 - 16.2	Log used for analysis	148,166 / - 10.74 / -	TR via LF
<i>FTE</i>	Number of reported full-time equivalent	0 - 40	-	1 / 2.73	TR via LF

Table 10: Overview of variables

3.2 Methodological approach

The use of statistical inference as the logical point of departure in social science study is familiar and deployed across research fields. By observing what has already occurred, statistics is the closest alternative method to the experiment that is available. Instead of recreating the environment in which a phenomenon is observed, the statistical method lends itself to scientists by making possible the manipulation of already existing data in a conceptual manner (Moses and Knutsen 2012, 93). An important observation of the shortcomings of a statistical approach is the possibility to only control for variables that are known to exert influence, leaving behind the likelihood of omitted variables.

Thankfully, science is, in the words of John Gerring, not a solitary venture. He conceptualizes sciences as a collaborative project among researchers working on a particular subject area (Gerring 2012, 91). Identifying factors which help explain phenomena in the social sciences has been tedious challenge since the founding of statistics as a scientific tool (Moses and Knutsen 2012, 71). The cumulation of knowledge on a certain area is dependent on scientists devoting time for it. Interest groups in general, and EU interest groups in particular, have seen a growing focus within political science, providing literature and research designs helpful for novice authors. The research question has therefore been anchored in interest group theory, and reasonable variables have been identified and accounted for.

3.2.1 Count regression analysis – create new subsection title

In this chapter the dependent variable *meetings* was operationalized as contact with the EC through meetings. These features have implications for the apt methodological approach in this thesis. First and foremost, this concerns the count data measure as occurrences of an event in a fixed domain (King 1988, 838). The counts are number of meetings with the EC. These counts are limited in the two dimensions time and space: since registration of meetings in 2014 to 2021, and interest groups registered in the TR. A count variable only includes positive integer values or zero, because an event naturally cannot occur a negative number of times (Coxe, West, and Aiken 2009, 121). As is evident for the *meetings* variable, interest groups have either had one or several meetings with the commission, or none.

The type of data affects the choice of the statistical framework in count data regressions (Cameron and Trivedi 1998, 2). The abovementioned dimensions time and space confine the data. As the two dimensions time and space have been identified, time-series data could be beneficial. The LF data base does not enable indexation of meetings, nor is this aspect at the core of the RQ, as the operationalization of access (*meetings*) is expected to be dependent on interest group EU membership status. Given the properties of the observed data set, these are considered as cross-sectional (Gray 1976, 237).

The distribution of the values on the dependent variable described in subchapter 3.1.2 suggests the need for an alternative approach to model fitting than when dealing with a data set with normal distribution of the values. This data characteristic is usually referred to as overdispersion (Dean 1992, 451). Referring to the description of the dependent variable, it is evident that the

meetings disparity is also present within the three interest group types. Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of meetings within types by plots.

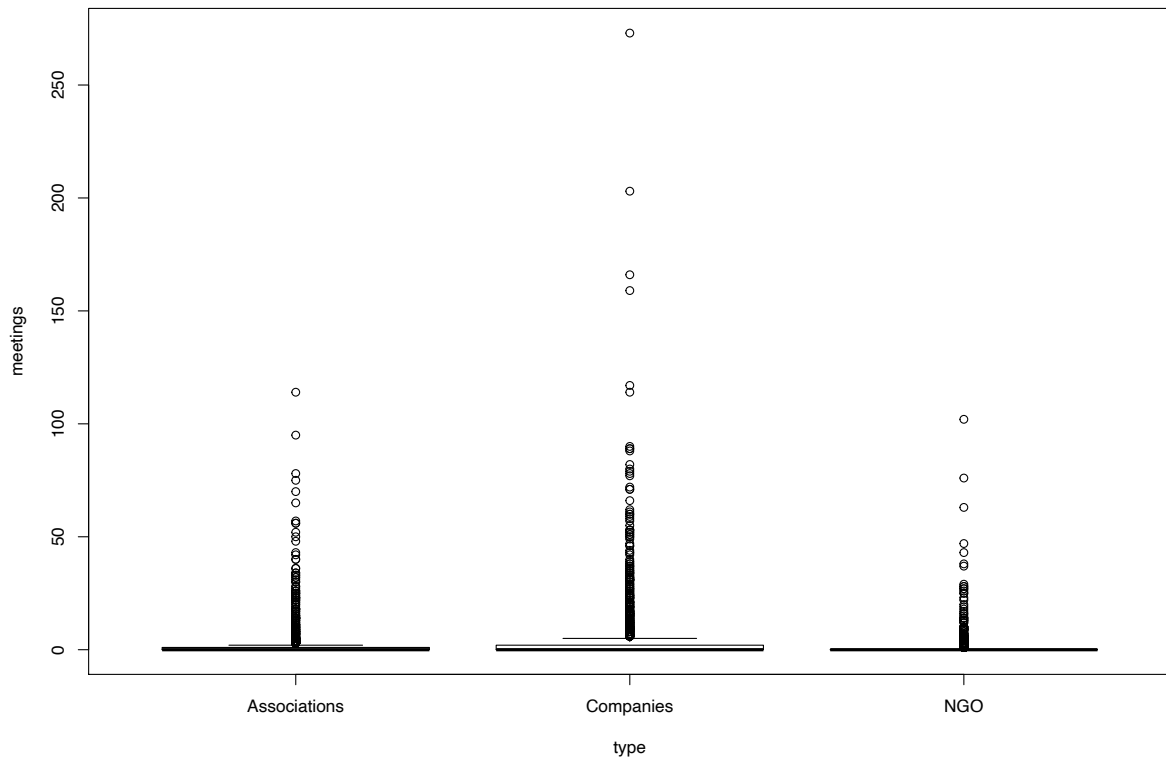


Figure 5: Dispersion of meetings within group types

Recalling the 4460 interest groups that have had no meetings with the EC, it is safe to say that the data set contains overdispersed zeros. The average of 2.3 meetings is impacted by those fewer but more meeting-frequent groups. As the meetings variable has a standard deviation of 9.23, this value greatly exceeds the mean for the number of meetings. This is not automatically an issue, as excess zeros are common when dealing with count data (Li, Lee, and Yeh 2019, 1301).

There are easy ways around the issue of overdispersion which result in lacking and imprecise analysis, such as rescaling the variable to include ranges (e.g., 0-5, 6-10), or creating a dichotomous variable simply stating whether meetings occurred or did not occur. Altering the characteristics of the variable does however potentially waste information and dilute statistical

power (Gardner, Mulvey, and Shaw 1995, 392). In this case, such a move would negate the benefits of the Binderkrantz and Pedersen conceptualization of access as a matter of degrees. It is therefore not considered a rewarding tactic when investigating interest group factors for EC access.

Methods have been developed to address the overdispersion in count data, of which the Poisson distribution became the benchmark model (Cameron and Trivedi 1998, 3). Within the Poisson family, negative binomial regression has been claimed to be a better fit as this method accounts for overdispersion by assuming that there will be unexplained variability among observations who have the same predicted value. (Coxe, West, and Aiken 2009, 132). The negative binomial can be explained as a form of Poisson regression which includes a random component. This component reflects the uncertainty about the true rates at which events occur (Gardner, Mulvey, and Shaw 1995, 399). The negative binomial is applied, and further justifications will be made in the analysis chapter.

4. Analysis

With the data, theoretical argument and hypotheses described in the previous chapter, this part of the thesis is devoted to the analysis of data set using the quantitative method defined above. A goal in this regard is to produce results of the analysis and identify findings for the hypotheses developed based on interest group literature and the gap in the literature relating to effect of EU membership.

The quantitative method produces estimates with uncertainty, but they allow interpretation of the results for use to evaluate the hypotheses. As with the previous steps leading up to the analysis, caution is advised also in interpretation. The analysis is conducted by help of descriptive statistics, indicative plots, and results from the regression analysis for which negative binomial models were utilized.

Tables 12 and 13 provide some descriptive statistics for the two independent variables *EU membership* and *interest group type*. Looking at EU membership, we observe a higher mean for non-EU interest groups than for EU groups; more than twice as many. The two other measures, standard deviation, and variance, shows that there is high dispersion within the data set – the number of meetings tend to be far away from the mean. Recalling subchapter 3.2, overdispersion as is present here is considered regular for count data of this kind. For EU groups, standard deviation is more than four times the mean.

	Non-EU groups (0)	EU groups (1)
Mean	4.18	1.96
Standard deviation	14.15	8.03
Variance	200.21	64.52

Table 11: Descriptive statistics of meetings by EU membership

	Associations	Companies	NGO	All groups
Mean	2.05	3.88	0.93	2.29
Standard deviation	7.51	13.16	4.11	9.24
Variance	56.44	173.151	16.96	85.37

Table 12: Descriptive statistics of meetings by interest group type

For interest group types, there are also considerable differences between the three. Companies & groups have a mean of close to 4 meetings. The entries in this group type have on average more than four times the number of meetings compared to NGOs, with the lowest average of with less than one meeting. Similar to the EU variable, the other centrality measures reveal big differences within the group types as well. This is particularly evident for companies & groups. Recalling Table 3, it has already been established that the top six groups in terms of number of meetings were within this group type. Therefore, these descriptive values are considered to accurately reflect the assumption of the research question.

As discussed above, non-EU interest groups have a higher average number of meetings than interest groups from inside the EU. This is a surprising indication, as a reasonable expectation would be that EU groups with their ability to provide expert knowledge, both information on the domestic in addition to the European encompassing interest and public support showed higher meeting frequency than groups from outside the EU. Recalling the access goods in Table 1, non-EU groups are at least considered less prone to being granted access for their information on the European encompassing interest.

Although the tables do not reveal any explanations as to why meetings divide themselves between the values of the two variables, they are quite interesting by themselves. The two independent variables do seem to suggest that they contain qualities that influence the number of meetings. A difference for meeting incidence has been established in interest group type and EU membership. In addition to speaking to the RQ assumption of different degrees of access being granted depending on EU membership and interest group type, it supports the differentiation made between different types of interest groups.

Having these descriptive statistics as a backdrop, the next subchapter presents the results from the negative binomial regression models. This enables further analysis of the hypotheses and seeing the independent variables in relation to each other.

4.1 Negative binomial regression: Explaining meeting frequency

The subchapter presents the results from the analysis. As a starting point, assumptions for the specific generalized linear models are outlined, followed by interaction plots of the conditional effect of EU membership. These plots enable an analysis aided by visualizations, but it is not sufficient for assessing the strengths of the hypotheses. As such interpretation of the results from the regression analysis is also conducted, in which controls are added. The findings are further discussed in chapter 5.

From the outset of the analysis, measures were taken to examine the correlation between variables. Some correlation is expected in the regression models, as correlation reflects the nature of the data being systematically related (Johnson, Reynolds, and Mycoff 2015, 168). If it was an analysis on factors within the EU interest group with no correlation, the research design would have to be reconsidered. If multicollinearity is present, included variables in the models may affect each other to such an extent it is difficult to untie the relationships (York 2012, 1380).

As a rule of thumb, starting from zero, values below 10 are commonly accepted. It is however important not to exclude problematic variables because of high VIF values. This is crucial in order to avoid biases in this process (O’Brien 2007, 674). The results from the VIF test are found in Table 13.⁷ All variables yield a VIF value significantly lower than any relevant threshold, and multicollinearity is found to be absent.

Variable	VIF value
EU	1.023
Interest group type	1.110
Days	1.106
Costs (log)	1.502
Full-time employees	1.417

Table 13: Results from VIF test

⁷ Exhaustive VIF table in appendix C.

As alluded to in the previous chapter, negative binomial regression follows certain assumptions about the scattering of values on the dependent variable. If Poisson regression were to be used, the variance ought to be equal to the mean (Coxe, West, and Aiken 2009, 123). Table 14 shows that variance in the dependent variable greatly exceeds the mean value. This supports the expected overdispersion. This is also established in a descriptive manner in Figure 1. Contrary to Poisson distribution models, negative binomial regression permits accounting for other forms of overdispersion, making it the standard parametric model to remedy the inconsistent count measure (Cameron and Trivedi 1998, 71).

Mean	Variance
2.29	85.37

Table 14: Mean and variance of dependent variable

Other than the way of addressing (over)dispersion of values, the assumptions of Poisson model regression and negative binomial regression are the same (Lawless 1987, 209). As mentioned earlier, these models require a positive integer indicating the number of occurrences of an event creating a count variable. The data set includes a count of 14,923 meetings spread among 6,512 interest groups. This constitutes a large sample, considered beneficial for the method in question.

Typical with such samples and as such for negative binomial regressions is the presence of a large number of zero values (Coxe, West, and Aiken 2009, 134). Keeping in mind the 4460 interest groups of the 6512 with no meetings, this is also the case here. With the justifications above, the assumptions for running a negative binomial regression are met. The results of the regression are presented in Table 15. Dependent variable is number of meetings with the EC. Standard errors are shown in brackets, with values presented as incidence rate ratios.

Model 1 observes the effect of *EU membership* on the dependent variable *meetings*. In model 2 *interest group type* is added, allowing the examination of the three types of associations: trade & business associations, companies & groups, and NGOs. Model 3 adds the control variables *days in the TR*, *interest group costs*, and *number of full-time employees*. As the hypotheses expect the relationship between outside and inside interest groups to be contingent on interest group type, an interaction effect is added in model 4. The regression requires a reference value

of the categorical variable in order to measure the effect, which is the group type associations. The regression output therefore provides values for companies and NGOs.

Models 5-7 and 8-10 mimic the foregoing models, but subsets of the data were made in order to isolate variable effects for the three group types. Models 5-7 includes only the main independent variable *EU membership*, whereas model 8-10 incorporates the control variables. As the interest group types are separated in these models, no values are given for group type nor interaction effects.

Model	1	2	3	4	Models 5-7			Models 8-10		
	IRR (Std.err) Full sample				IRR (Std.err) Interest group type					
					Associations	Companies	NGO	Associations	Companies	NGO
<i>EU</i>	0.470*** (0.070)	0.484*** (0.469)	0.055*** (0.041)	0.388*** (0.057)	0.512** (0.110)	0.503*** (0.070)	0.444*** (0.075)	0.372*** (0.060)	0.838 (0.084)	0.490*** (0.072)
<i>IG type</i>										
<i>Companies</i>		1.832*** (0.160)	2.059*** (0.146)	1.142 (0.194)	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>NGO</i>		0.446*** (0.040)	1.050 (0.078)	0.892 (0.160)	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Days</i>			1.001*** (0.000)	1.001*** (0.000)	-	-	-	1.001*** (0.000)	1.000*** (0.000)	1.000*** (0.000)
<i>Costs (log)</i>			1.604*** (0.037)	1.609*** (0.037)	-	-	-	1.435*** (0.172)	1.697*** (0.056)	1.535*** (0.069)
<i>FTE</i>			1.001 (0.011)	1.009 (0.011)	-	-	-	1.099*** (0.027)	0.961* (0.019)	1.006 (0.017)
<i>EU *</i>				2.045*** (0.381)	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Companies</i>										
<i>EU * NGO</i>				1.225 (0.240)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Constant	1.430 (0.092)	1.315 (0.106)	-6.060 (0.026)	-5.816 (0.028)	1.266 (0.199)	1.888 (0.126)	0.578 (0.155)	-4.738 (0.550)	-6.465 (0.367)	-5.158 (0.488)
AIC	18,769	18,498	16,418	16,404	4,680.9	8,757.5	5,035.6	4,202.4	7,538.4	4,554.2
BIC	18,789.23	18,531.42	16,471.58	16,471.65	4,697.29	8,774.79	5,052.98	4,235.07	7,572.83	4,588.68
logLik ⁸	-9,381.44	-9,243.76	-8,200.78	-8,192.07	-2,337.45	4,375.75	-2,514.80	-2,095.19	-3,763.20	-2,271.10
N	6512	6512	6512	6512	1740	2346	2426	1740	2346	2426

Significance codes: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05 *** 0.01

Table 15: Results from the negative binomial regression

Note: dependent variable is number of meetings with the EC. The values are presented as incidence rate ratios (IRR).

⁸ Log likelihood

Model 1 tests the effect of EU membership on the number of meetings with the EC. Based on this bivariate model, a non-EU interest group is expected to have 1.4 meetings. The model expects the effect of the EU membership to have an incidence rate at 0.470, or a 53 % lower incidence, making the predicted number of meetings for EU interest groups 0.67. It is statistically significant at 1 %, making this a probable prediction. Not only does the model imply lower meeting frequency for EU groups compared to non-EU groups, but the effect is rather substantial.

Model 2 is the multivariate model, as it also includes the categorical variable interest group type. The EU variable predicts a slightly higher incidence rate than model 1 (51,6 % of non-EU groups) when the interest group types are included, also significant at 1 %. With a lower intercept than model 1, this model predicts 0,63 meetings for EU groups. Associations is the reference group of the categorical interest group type variable, meaning that the IRR for companies and NGOs in the model are relative to associations. This model indicates an 82,3 % higher incidence rate for companies, while NGOs is down to below 50 % of the meetings compared to associations. The significance is considerable for both types. This indicates that greater access could be expected for companies compared to associations, while NGOs are predicted to have the least access of the three group types.

The membership variable in model 3 predicts a very low IRR for EU groups, making the predicted number of meetings -0.33. Model 4 includes the interaction effect group type and membership. An interaction effect is present when the effect of an independent variable on the dependent variable differs depending on the value of a third variable (Jaccard and Turrisi 2003, 3). The hypotheses has an interaction term as they expect interest group type access to be effected by EU membership. H₁ expects no membership effect on the exchange of expert knowledge, while H₂ and H₃ with basis in the literature suggest that EU membership could matter for the provision of public support and EU policy knowledge from a domestic context (IDEI), respectively.

For models that include interaction terms, visualizations in plots are particularly helpful to understand how predictors and outcome are associated. Figure 6 shows plots for the interaction effect in model 4 between *EU* and *type* (EU*type) for the three interest group types on the dependent variable *meetings*.

Interaction effect of EU and interest group type

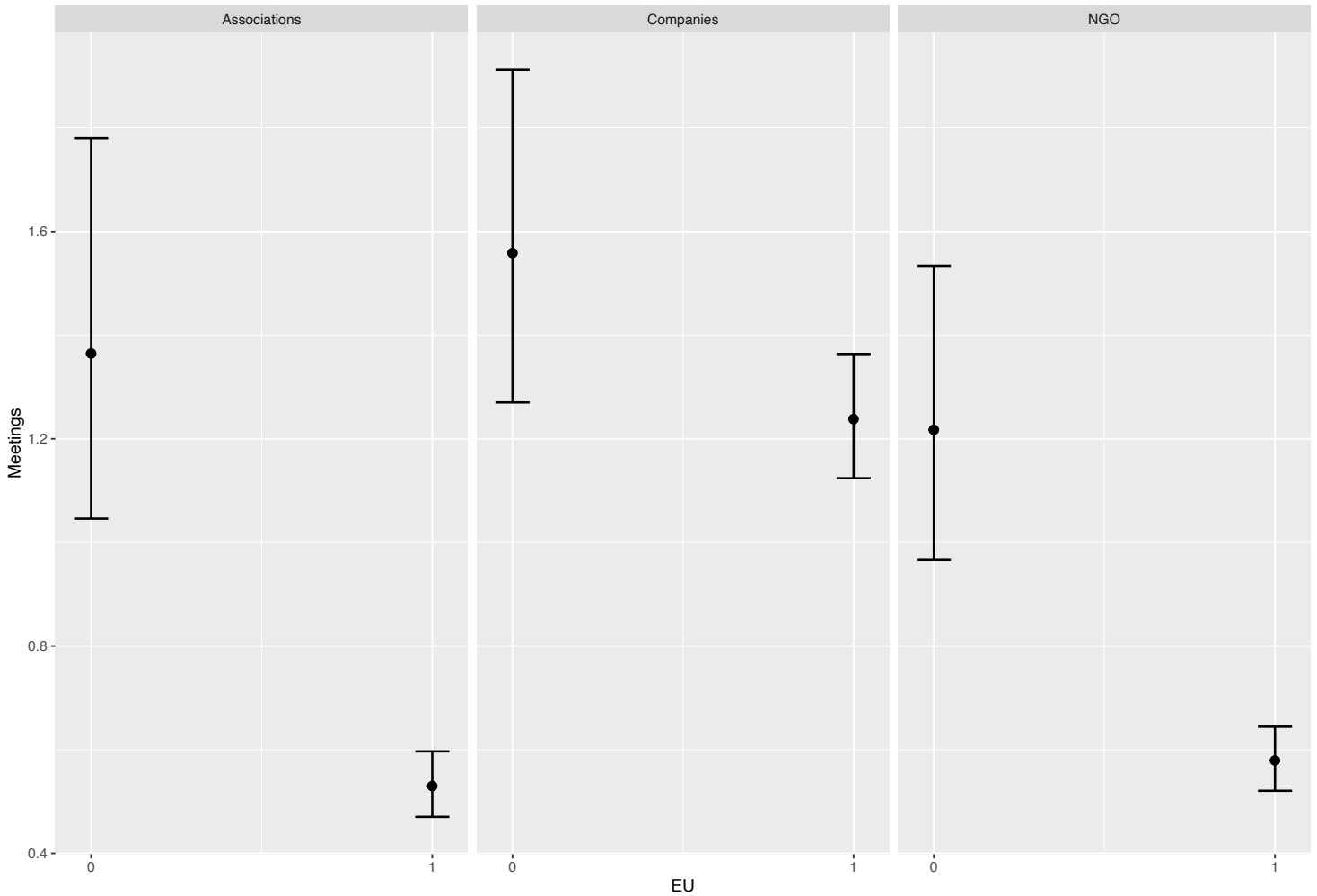


Figure 6: Interaction plots for EU and type of interest groups

By visualizing the interactions, it becomes very clear that according to the regression in model 4 based on the data set, in fact non-EU groups in these models have an advantage over EU groups in terms of access. The direction of the effect is similar in direction for all three groups, while the strength differs.

The EC need for expert knowledge from companies & groups is with reference to Bouwen’s typology dislodged from any EU membership effect. By first observing the plot for EU groups, it predicts slightly above 1.2 meetings. Non-EU groups are plotted higher, closer to a prediction of 1.6 meetings. By default, the plot package plots the interaction with whiskers spanning the 95 % confidence interval. The longer whiskers of non-EU groups spans part of the EU groups’ confidence interval, indicating that predicted outcomes may overlap between

the two. Nonetheless, it seems that the interaction effect does not play out as expected in the company hypothesis.

NGOs, often engaging in civil society by its very nature, are considered providers of public support for decision-makers. Within the system of interest groups as transmission belts, the public support has been established as an access good in the relationship between NGOs and the EC. H₂ expects NGOs from inside the EU to be granted greater levels of success in return for the public support. The EU NGOs have a predicted value at just below 0.6 meetings. NGOs from outside the EU are plotted close to 1.2 meetings, although with a bigger span within the confidence interval.

The trade & business associations in H₃ are expected to provide information on the domestic encompassing interest (IDEI), with their ability to provide information on how for instance policy could be drafted in a useful way within member states. For EU associations the model predicts a value of around 0.5, while for non-EU groups the prediction is closer to 1.4. Within the confidence interval it does however predict a range between .7 and .8; a reminder of the variation within the data set. Neither in this plot are there findings in support for the hypothesis, as higher values have been predicted for non-EU groups than for EU groups.

Looking at the three types under one, the plots seem to paint a picture quite different than what was expected based on the hypotheses. As a matter of fact, the predicted interaction effect is contrary to the assumptions made based on the relationship between interest groups and the EC. Of the three, companies & groups is only interest group where the model predicts above 1 meeting for both EU and non-EU groups.

This could be interpreted as companies & groups being the type of group with the least distinction between interest groups originating inside and outside the Union. While the assumption of H₁ was no difference between companies & groups, the difference is smaller within the membership variable than the other two types. Nonetheless, the observed interaction works opposite than what was expected, indicating at this stage that the hypothesis should be rejected. While the interaction plots create expectations to the, it is not sufficient to

With the addition of the control variables in model 3, only companies is significant for the group types. Yet this significant IRR is substantial with an incidence rate at 105,9 %,

predicting companies to have 12.48 meetings. Days in the TR seems to have a small impact with an IRR of 1.001, while this is a good example of keeping in mind how ranges in variable coding play out for the effect. The number of days range from 11 to 4714, meaning that according to this model interest groups that have been present for many years could have a leg up on their lobbying counterparts.

The two control variables *days* and *costs* are statistically significant, while *full-time employees* is not significant. As such, the effects of the two latter are sought interpreted. The number of days in the TR ranges from 11 to 4714, while the logarithmic scale of *costs* covers 0 – 10,000,000 € in a range of 78 steps. The variable IRRs on 1.050 and 1.604, respectively, shows that the longevity of a given group's presence may bear significance for the number of meetings. Additionally, The role of budgetary power in interest group activities has in the literature been identified as a potential contributing factor (Dür 2008a, 1225).

Models 5-7 predicts as mentioned the effect of EU membership for isolated group types. It should be mentioned that because the groups have been split up into separate models, it is not advisable to compare across the groups, as ratios have been calculated separately for individual group types. For the group types associations, companies & groups, and NGOs, these models predicts a lower IRR for EU groups. All three group types are statistically significant with a confidence interval at 95 %, companies & groups and NGOs with the strongest significance.

While the models are not able to recreate the real environment of interest groups in the EU, they provide information to assess the effect of certain variables. The AIC and BIC values are expected to shed light on the fit of models, while choosing between the two depends on knowledge of the true model (Vrieze 2012, 241). AIC is valuable when evaluating models and enables selection of the models performing optimally for the regression (Liu and Yang 2011, 2074).

The three first models with progressively more variables added show a decrease in the AIC (and BIC), going from 18,769 to 16,418. The decline in the negative log likelihood also suggests that the third model with all variables provide predictions with a higher probability. Model 4 includes as discussed the expected interaction effect of interest group type on the EU variable, which has benefitted from the interaction effect plots in order to interpret these.

5. Discussion

The discussion chapter has four subchapters, each with a designated role in an attempt of connecting the dots of the preceding analysis. First off there is an evaluation of the hypotheses, followed by some considerations regarding the theoretical basis of the thesis and its implications for the RQ investigating the effect of EU membership on interest group access. This segues into limitations of the thesis, of which both research design concerns and recommendations for further research on this timely and relevant topic.

The thesis sought out to answer the following research question:

How does EU membership affect interest group access to EU institutions, is access subject to interest group type, and how do the access goods provided by interest groups from inside or outside the EU alter their chances for access?

Results from the analysis suggest that EU membership does in fact affect the level of access, as interest groups are predicted different incidence rates on the EU. membership variable predicts different incidence rates as EU interest groups consecutively are predicted to have lower meeting incidence. Moreover, the interaction effect of EU membership and interest group type indicates a difference between trade & business associations, companies & groups, and NGOs. These findings will have implications for the following discussion subchapters.

5.1 Evaluation of the hypotheses

The thesis has developed and tested three hypotheses. This first subchapter evaluates all of them in with the research question as an underlying basis. Table 16 summarizes the evaluations of the hypotheses. The hypotheses were developed with an assumption that non-EU groups are disadvantaged in terms of EC access, and interest groups being an important distinction in determining interest group access.

Regarding the regression's predicted lower level of access for EU groups, it was observed that the incidence rate was lower for the two groups trade & business associations and NGOs than compared to companies & groups. Nonetheless it seems careless to assign any other label than rejected to H₁. For H₂ and H₃ it is clear that the findings here do not support the assumption of EU groups within the two types trade & business associations and NGOs having an advantage when opposed their non-EU counterparts.

Hypothesis	Assessment based on analysis
H₁: Companies from the EU member states and non-EU countries have equal levels of access to the European Commission.	Rejected Note: companies & groups experience the least different degree of access for EU and non-EU groups.
H₂: Non-governmental organizations from within the EU is granted access to a greater degree than equivalent interest groups from outside the EU.	Rejected
H₃: Trade and business associations from inside the EU experience a higher degree of access than non-EU corresponding national associations.	Rejected

Table 16: Evaluation of hypotheses

How does EU membership affect interest group access to EU institutions?

Available interest group literature has shown that the European Commission, as one of many EU institutions, is a primary addressee for interest group efforts. As the Union's equivalent to the executive branch of government, it has power to shape the development of the EU due to its right of initiative. Additionally, access data is available for the EC through registration of meeting activity. As argued in chapter 2.4, the literature has not yet considered the possible effect of EU membership present in the three hypotheses.

The plotted conditional effect of EU membership and interest group type in Figure 6 does in fact show that the two variables influence each other. An important restriction to interaction effect interpretations in this form is avoiding overinterpretation, meaning that it is not possible to make any causality inferences. What is surprising is the direction of the interaction effect, as the coefficients decrease from 0 (non-EU) to 1 (EU) on the membership variable for all three interest group types.

An effect of EU membership in the same negative direction is present for the three groups in the same model, with a statistically significant incidence rate ratio. For the three groups combined, the regression outputs indicate that EU groups has a lower IRR than non-EU groups equivalent to 61.2 %. This indicates that EU membership affects interest groups, in what those seeking access from within the EU would say, the wrong direction. According to these results, EU membership actually lowers the probability of meetings with the EC.

Although having identified an effect of interest group country of origin on access, the unanticipated finding is deserving of some discussion on why this may be the case. Turning to interest group literature, researchers have observed the phenomenon of interest groups putting their heads together for (expectantly) similar ambitions – ‘lobbying in coalitions’ (Klüver 2013, 53) With this as a strategy, it is not necessary for each interest group to initiate the two-step process of access by seeking it. If a coalition of 10 companies convey their positions via an umbrella organization, the views of the 10 have been communicated while only one group is registered with a meeting.

One main distinction concerning interest group origin is whether they have lobbying avenues made available through the institutional context in which they operate. Taking the example of an NGO, it might see fit to approach their domestic public actors such as government officials. This might decrease the strategic value of going ‘straight to the top’ at EU level, when their access good (public support) is better put to use at a lower level. With non-EU groups circumstances are different, as for instance Norwegian NGOs do not experience the same political relay compared to member state NGOs.

Is access subject to interest group type?

As was established in chapter 2, the represented interests in the EU sphere are quite diverse. Within chapter 3 under independent variables, interest group types in the Transparency Register were explored. Of the total 15 groups and listed in TR, three different group types were identified as relevant in subchapter 3.1.3.1 and used in the analysis.

Between these interest group types, there are evidently differences in terms of meeting activity, as illustrated in Figure 5. Of the registered groups, the six with the highest number of meetings were companies. The mean values for meetings by group type shows descriptively that

companies on average meets often with the EC than associations, and both associations and NGOs have a lower average than the three combined. It is also clear that whereas different interest types seem to experience difference degrees of access, there is also large variation among groups within each individual group type.

While this speaks in favor of interest group types experiencing different degrees of access, the results from the analysis in model 4 indicate IRR with sufficiently low statistical significance within the variable levels (type) to assert any relationship between access and group type. The literature has identified that different lobbying strategies have resulted in different degrees of access depending on interest group type such as for business interests, while later studies have moderated this distinction.

Looking at model 3, a statistically significant increased IRR for companies is however present. It predicts a double incident rate compared to the value reference (associations). A takeout from this could be a strengthened belief in the perception of companies being granted more access than their trade & business associations and NGO counterparts.

Do different access goods alter chances for access?

Interest groups providing resources to the EC is argued as the foundation of the interdependent relationship between the two groups of actors. As mentioned in subchapter 2.3.1, the intangible resources they provide are mostly information. In addition to the informational resources, public support is argued an access good as a supplement to Bouwen's typology (Table 1). This part of the research question in practice thus becomes an extension of the previous section.

The type of access good that is provided depends on the interest group types, as they represent different interests in society and accumulate knowledge in different spheres. For NGO's, these are argued to have the option of providing public support based on their outsider strategy approach in their efforts. The hypothesis distinguishes clearly between the different access goods (and as such interest group types). While the question is theoretically interesting, the complexity of the interest group system in the EU may make it problematic in practice. As noted in subchapter 2.2.3 on lobbying, interest groups consider the use of insider and outsider strategies (Beyers, Eising, and Maloney 2008, 1121). As such, it is conceivable that interest

groups can provide more than one type of access good, as both combinations of informational resources as well as information in addition to public support.

Following from the previous discussion regarding interest group type affecting access, it is recalled that companies & groups was the interest group type with statistically significant predicted high access. With companies & groups' ability to provide expert knowledge to the EC, this can be interpreted as an access good in high demand. This particular interest group type has also been associated with significant resources, as was also illustrated by the companies with the highest number of meetings with the EC. This suggestion is partially substantiated by the effect of the control variables, of which costs seems to be of relevance for companies when looking at it as an isolated interest group type.

5.2 Theoretical and empirical considerations

The aim of this thesis has been to contribute to the existing literature on EU interest group research. The literature chapter revealed and identified a gap in the literature: whereas much attention has been devoted to interest groups in the EU, the attempts of interest groups from outside the EU to influence policy has been the concern of fewer. As the EU has expanded its policy portfolio, Union law reaches beyond its borders. The effect of EU membership has been investigated in a couple of recent works, but these are concerned with policy sector approaches or certain lobbying interests. An attempt to broaden the EU effect to a wider population of interest groups was therefore deemed useful for the field of interest group research.

While the hypotheses in the thesis were rejected, the findings may contribute to further attention on the EU membership effect. As the interdependent relationship between interest groups and the EC according to the analysis is in favor of one of the geographically divided interest group classes, the non-EU groups, an effect has been identified. The statistical uncertainty implores further exploration. This will be further discussed in the recommendations for future research.

As mentioned in subchapter 2.2.3, the regulatory framework of interest groups in the EU is considered to be of relevance. As such, contemporary research is conducted within the limitations of the same rules and regulations. With a new IIA adopted by the EU, creating a mandatory register, it will be interesting to see what effect this internal policy has on the external efforts of influence (European Parliament 2021).

5.2 Limitations

Steps were taken in order to develop a research design in accordance with criteria for a reliable process, conducting the analysis and its results has revealed some limitations to the thesis. This subchapter seeks to point out some of these, which would be valuable lesson for another research venture.

As discussed in subchapter 3.1.1.1, two country cases were justifiably excluded from the data set. The possible individual coding of Belgian interest groups could have enabled an inclusion of its national level interest groups. The inclusion of European level BE groups could potentially have contributed to development of further hypotheses with the aim of testing the non-EU access for IEEI. As evident from the discussion chapter, EK, IDEI and PS did not show considerable EU group advantage. The reasonable next step would then be to test the effect of EU membership on interest groups providing IEEI, but the need to limit the scope of a relatively broad approach made operating level differentiation a challenging task.

Creating the independent variable EU membership was essential in investigating the RQ and the implications interest group origin has for access to the EC. The dichotomous variable included values for EU and non-EU groups, distinguishing between those originating inside the Union and those on the outside attempting to influence within the EU. While this was considered an appropriate and justifiable move based on the research question, it had consequences on the merits of the thesis.

As any political scientist knows, a dichotomous variable does not capture the features of the observation beyond its yes or no status, in this case being an EU group or not. While the EU groups are arguably similar in belonging in an economic and political union, the xxxx non-EU groups share fewer common features. This can be illustrated by groups originating from the United States and China, with literally an ocean separating them. As for groups geographically closer to the EU, such as Norway included in the EEA and Switzerland with its geographical proximity, these too disappear in the dichotomous variable.

As a quantitative approach was decided, there is always the question of omitted variables. While none were knowingly left out as a step to improve the results, other measures could have been

included as a step to better investigate the relationship between EU and non-EU groups. The thesis has investigated individual interest groups in pursuit of effects of their own characteristics, first and foremost EU membership. Depending on interest group type and policy issue, interest groups lobbying are as previously mentioned likely to join forces by establishing or becoming part of networks or coalitions with likeminded groups (Beyers and De Bruycker 2018, 980; Klüver 2012, 496). These are not visible in the data base utilized in the thesis.

As a consequence, it is possible that two or several groups working together offset registered individual lobbying activity, for instance in number of meetings. While TR entries include a list of memberships of e.g., associations and (con)federations, this data is lost in the LF data base, which provides the essential meetings variable. Consequently, the thesis sought to capture the reality of individual interest group activity, but an environment as complex as the representation of interest groups in the EU would possibly benefit from a different aperture.

5.3 Recommendations for further research

By being aware of the limitations of the thesis, certain recommendations have been formulated in order to improve the interesting approach to the EU membership effect on interest group access. First and foremost, reference is given to the option of identifying interest group level of operation. This could potentially gain insight into the different arenas interest groups operate in, namely the domestic and European levels.

The comment on differentiation between non-EU groups is also considered useful for further analysis. This could be done in several ways, for instance geographically by further separating European interest groups. Another way to code countries could be by regions of the world, both enabling a distinction between economic powers in the world in addition to purely geographical matters.

For the important aspect of lobbying coalitions, the measure of identifying the interest group network is considered demanding in terms of resources. While the Transparency Register provides an overview of interest group memberships, analyzable data would have to be provided by scholars already involved with this particular interest group research. The expectation is however that the effort would pay off.

This discussion chapter has attempted to summarize the findings in the thesis with the research question as a guide. A cordial cue in this regard has been the advice for researchers to view conclusions as inherently uncertain, as neither measurement nor theory in the social sciences is ever perfect and complete (Collier, Seawright, and Munck 2010, 35). With this in mind, limitations to the thesis both in theoretical aspects and with regard to the research design has been attempted identified with the ambition of adding to the cumulative knowledge in the field of EU interest group research.

6. Concluding remarks

The research question, which early in the process has created difficulties with regards to producing an analysis taking into account the complex nature of EU interest groups. Nonetheless, it has been rewarding. This final chapter summarizes the process, and lastly attempts to gather the contributions. These are hopefully of use to those following in the footsteps of EU interest group studies.

6.1 Summary and conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the EU membership effect on access to the European Commission for certain interest group types. The selection of three of the available interest group types was based on their ability to provide the access goods expert knowledge, information about the domestic encompassing interest and public support.

By reviewing current EU interest group literature, focus was drawn to the multitude of factors that are investigated in interest group research. By including a selection of these in accordance with the options provided by the LF data base, the thesis enabled production of a relevant data set used for quantitative analysis on EU and non-EU interest group access.

The findings suggest that there are differences between levels of access for groups from inside the EU and groups from the outside. The effect appears to be somewhat contingent on interest group type, but due to varying statistical significance it is challenging to provide conclusive answers on the relationship.

The hypotheses expected a positive effect of EU membership on the level of access to the EC. Having to reject the hypotheses, the impression left behind is of a reverse effect, actually speaking in favor of non-EU interest groups. Without the analysis on such a relationship, this must be considered speculations aimed at enlightening the relationship. As mentioned in the recommendations for future research, this effect merits further research.

6.2 Contributions

The findings in this thesis are considered valuable for several reasons. The main argument in this regard is the thesis' approach to an aspect of EU interest group literature which researchers

to the best of my knowledge has devoted inadequate attention to. While studies have explored for instance lobbying strategies from outside the EU, broader analyses based on interest group types and an EU membership effect has remained a dark hole in the field. It seems pertinent to ask how this came to be, but a more constructive comment would be to note the importance of understanding the mechanisms by which the variety of organized interests from outside the EU operate.

Secondly, while the hypotheses were rejected, unexpected results may also be considered useful findings. As the interest group field is still a niche field in the grand scheme of things, it benefits from all efforts attempting to diverge attention to new possibly advantageous approaches.

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8. Appendices

A: Histogram ranges for interest groups by type (number of meetings)

	Associations	Companies	NGO	Number of interest groups
0	1246	1371	1843	4460
1-4	336	604	474	1414
5-9	61	131	67	259
10-14	31	70	18	119
15-19	15	50	6	71
20-24	14	27	3	44
25-49	26	57	12	95
50-99	10	30	2	42
100-149	1	2	1	4
150-	0	4	0	4
Total	1740	2346	2426	6512

B: Interest groups by country

EU			Non-EU					
1	Austria	205	1	Argentina	6	44	Malaysia	4
2	Bulgaria	60	2	Armenia	1	45	Mali	1
3	Croatia	42	3	Australia	13	46	Mexico	2
4	Cyprus	25	4	Belize	1	47	Moldova	3
5	Czech Republic	82	5	Benin	1	48	Monaco	1
6	Denmark	153	6	Bermuda	2	49	Mongolia	1
7	Estonia	48	7	Bolivia	1	50	Montenegro	1
8	Finland	199	8	Bosnia-Herzegovina	3	51	Morocco	2
9	France	684	9	Brazil	12	52	Myanmar	1
10	Germany	1247	10	Burkina Faso	1	53	Nepal	1
11	Greece	101	11	Cambodia	3	54	Netherlands Antilles	1
12	Hungary	59	12	Canada	40	55	New Zealand	4
13	Ireland	162	13	Cayman Islands	1	56	Niger	1
14	Italy	489	14	Chile	1	57	Nigeria	4
15	Latvia	21	15	China	5	58	Norway	61
16	Lithuania	38	16	Congo (Kinshasa)	2	59	Pakistan	1
17	Luxembourg	67	17	Costa Rica	2	60	Palestinian Territories	2
18	Malta	23	18	Dominica	2	61	Papua New Guinea	1
19	Netherlands	580	19	Dominican Republic	1	62	Philippines	4
20	Poland	185	20	Ecuador	2	63	Qatar	1
21	Portugal	124	21	Egypt	1	64	Réunion	1
22	Romania	73	22	Ethiopia	1	65	Russia	9
23	Slovakia	43	23	Faeroe Islands	1	66	Senegal	3
24	Slovenia	56	24	Georgia	1	67	Serbia	6
25	Spain	559	25	Ghana	2	68	Singapore	8
26	Sweden	215	26	Gibraltar	1	69	South Africa	4
Total	(26)	5540	27	Guatemala	1	70	South Korea	3
			28	Hong Kong	7	71	Sri Lanka	2
			29	Iceland	4	72	Sudan	1
			30	India	5	73	Switzerland	234
			31	Indonesia	3	74	Syria	1
			32	Israel	6	75	Taiwan	2
			33	Ivory Coast	1	76	Tanzania	1
			34	Japan	19	77	Thailand	5
			35	Kazakhstan	1	78	Togo	2
			36	Kenya	3	79	Trinidad & Tobago	1
			37	Kiribati	1	80	Tunisia	3
			38	Kosovo	1	81	Turkey	21
			39	Laos	1	82	Ukraine	9
			40	Liberia	1	83	United Arab Emirates	5
			41	Liechtenstein	2	84	United States	384
			42	Macau	1	85	Uruguay	1
			43	Macedonia	4	86	Vietnam	1
			Total			(86)	972	

C: Results from VIF test

Variable	VIF value	Df	$\sqrt{\text{GVIF} / (2 * \text{Df})}$
EU	1.023	1	1.011
Interest group type	1.110	2	1.027
Days	1.106	1	1.052
Costs (log)	1.502	1	1.225
FTE	1.417	1	1.190