

# ecas

European Citizen Action Service

## Getting your message across in the labyrinth of EU decision-making

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### 12 Tips for the would-be European lobbyist



Avenue de la Toison d'Or, 77  
4th floor  
B-1060 Brussels  
Belgium  
Tel: +32 2 548 04 90  
Fax: +32 2 548 04 99  
Email: [publication@ecas.org](mailto:publication@ecas.org)  
Website: [www.ecas-citizens.eu](http://www.ecas-citizens.eu)

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**Getting your message across in the labyrinth of EU decision-making: 12 Tips for The Would-Be European Lobbyist**

Author: Tony Venables

Editor: Elisabeth Victoria Lasky

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# I. The Changing EU Lobbying Landscape

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At various stages over the last 20 years, ECAS has revised and up-dated its tips for the would-be European lobbyist. Over that period, the opportunities have increased, but the process has also become more difficult.

In 2007, the European Union celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. It was a good opportunity to stand back and review the strategy towards the EU. Questions arose: what have we achieved? What changed over the years and how should we go forward? ECAS has produced a 50 “question and answer” publication which traces the slow and often laborious ways for the citizen to gain a foothold in the process of European integration. The slogan with the EU is of course still, “it’s the economy stupid” but alongside that there is also, “it’s the law stupid”, despite the expansion of activity to more and more areas of interest to NGOs. Other reasons for re-thinking European strategy includes the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009.

**CSOs (civil society organisations) have a right and a duty to lobby on behalf of their members.** ECAS was set up in 1991 to create a better balance between commercial and public interests in lobbying and in that way to contribute to a citizens’ Europe. There are some 15,000 lobbyists around the EU Institutions, and although the presence of CSOs has increased since ECAS

*A better balance across societal interests can improve the quality of decision-making – more CSO lobbying is needed*

started partly due to its efforts, currently only 10% of lobbying is on behalf of non-profit causes. There is a tendency in the non-profit sector to claim that the best response is to denounce lobbying as a commercial activity and not take part, but that means that the arguments is lost. It would be better to reform the lobbying process from within by more, not less, participation by CSOs, since a better balance across societal interests can improve the quality of decision-making and keep more powerful lobbyists with a strong vested interest in check. However, that will never be enough to create a level playing field and other measures are still necessary.

**In May 2011, a joint transparency register of organisations engaged in EU policy making and policy implementation was established between the European Parliament and Commission.** The organisations have to sign up to a code of conduct and give details of their budget and how much is spent on lobbying.

## Transparency is a start, but further reforms should be considered:

- **Lobbying should not become a monopolising channel of influence towards the EU Institutions.** It should always be weighed up against consultation processes, impact assessments, opinion polls, citizens' views, complaints and other sources of evidence and research. Lobbyists are predatory and it is up to public authorities to keep them tamed.
- **Strengthening and extending consultation procedures is necessary to enable those without the resources to follow all stages of the decision-making process to have a say.** Interest groups, even if they are not constantly present, may have just as valid an argument as Brussels insiders. But they need to receive more feedback about the reasons for accepting some proposals or rejecting others. Decision-makers should apply the checklist in the Commission's minimum standards for consultation, to make sure that less organised interests are also heard.
- **Caring more about outsiders and minority interests as well as the "silent majority" is equally important.** There is a real danger that when those in a position of power claim, "we have consulted with civil society" and they actually believe that all societal interests have been included. It is the responsibility of legislators to be aware of those who do not lobby or participate in consultation processes and to take their interests into account.

CSOs should be a counter-lobby that point to the dangers of the democratic process, if not balanced and aggregated alongside other forms of involvement. It is important however that the non-profit organisations should avoid a "holier than thou" approach – a company or union threatened with closure because of new EU regulations has just as much of a right to lobby as do those defending a more diffuse general interest.

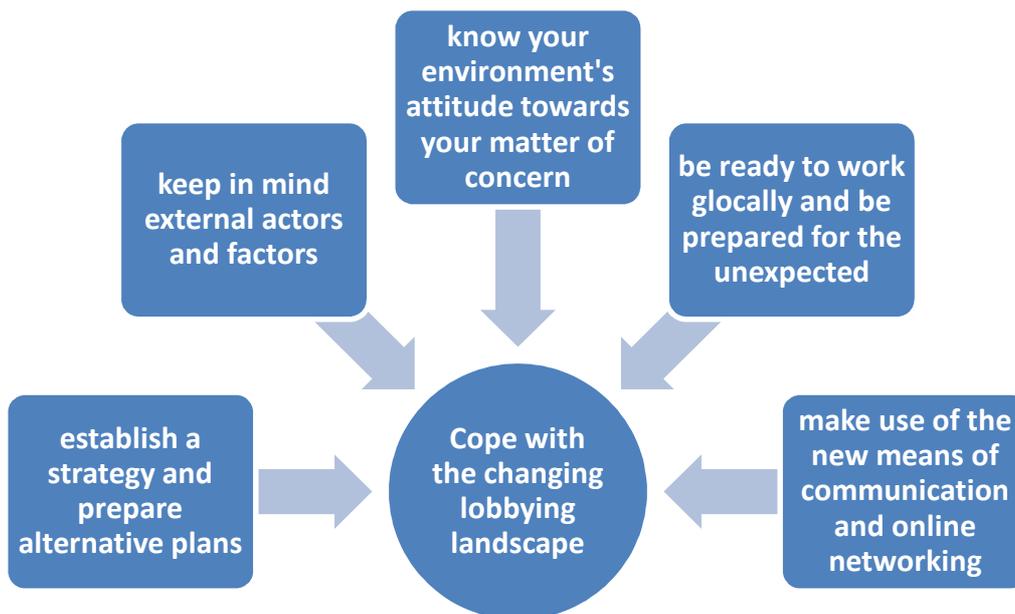
*CSOs should be a counter-lobby that points to the dangers of the democratic process, if lobbying is not balanced and aggregated alongside other forms of involvement*

What new factors need to be taken into account in revisiting the tips for lobbying? Studies by academics, advice from public affairs specialists and other European associations point generally to a number of factors.

## a. Changes in the roles of the Institutions

The roles of the Institutions are changing over time and differing quite markedly, case by case. For example, all observers consider that with the Lisbon Treaty, the role of the 6th monthly Presidency is less important than it was. Conversely, the distant, institutionalised European Council has become more important.

It is difficult to generalise about which Institutions have increased power or which have lost power. The exception is the European Parliament, which has gained greater legislative and budgetary powers in successive Treaty revisions. Not all European associations have adapted to this change. Sometimes the Commission not only initiates but pushes the whole process, and other times it resembles “the poodle” of the Council of Ministers. One thing to watch is that national parliaments have an increased role under the Lisbon Treaty.



## b. A more crowded agenda

All the Institutions now have a much more crowded agenda. It is much more difficult generally to persuade EU decision makers to take on new ideas, which has implications of course for European Citizens' initiatives. This also makes outcomes at EU level less predictable. **It is a good idea to have**

a “plan B” and as suggested below, devote time to both strategy and evaluation. More and more decision-making by the Institutions is a formal process which to succeed with 27 member states has to be supported by networks of interests bringing together the key internal and external actors.

### c. A Union open to the outside world

The international commitments of the EU are often a factor to be taken into account which could encourage or stand in the way of EU decisions. Climate change is discussed in the EU Institutions and driven by the European Council’s targets, but is on the agenda of the G8 and the UN as part of a strategy to ensure that binding EU commitments are matched by its trading partners. **The trend is towards the EU Institutions being less exclusive decision-making centres, with more external factors to be taken into account.**

*Current developments suggest that it is easier now to engage with the EU but it is harder to predict the results. The would-be European lobbyist has to weigh up carefully the pros and cons of embarking on this process*

### d. A wider Union which is less homogeneous

**At the same time, within the Union, the extent to which your own organisations and the governments in their countries are likely to feel concerned and involved with a particular EU initiative may differ markedly.** For the member states with more advanced rules, EU measures may change little, whilst in others they would have a big impact. There may also be big differences in how public opinion views a particular issue and it is necessary to have an increasing understanding of such uneven impacts.

### e. A Union less united

There is no doubt that the financial crisis has encouraged more nationalism. As a result, at the start of the decision-making process, it is not always clear where the problems may lie. The circles of interest involved are often not entirely predictable and can be asymmetric. These factors are well known to experienced EU-watchers. In a wider more diffuse Union, they become more evident. **This therefore increases the work-load on the would-be European lobbyist to operate at different geographical levels and to be prepared for the unexpected.**

It would however be correct to argue that many of those negative factors and difficulties can be overcome by the revolution in electronic communications. Social networks, interactive websites and

e-participation have all decreased costs and make European networking much faster and easier. Because of their greater flexibility and ability to react fast to a changing agenda, **this virtual networking and decision-making space increases the capacity of civil society organisations to participate in the debate and intervene effectively**. By comparison with commercial interests, CSOs are often more capable of creating networks and ensuring a rapid response by agreeing quickly on a new position on unforeseen developments. It is now possible to simultaneously lobby the European Institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg and keep communicating with the national networks.

On the other hand, increased communication and information overload also adds to the time spent accounting for lobbying. It is now expected that the would-be lobbyist should participate more in formal on-line consultation procedures, as well as informal on-line chats, which in no way detracts from the need for face-to-face meetings with legislators and policy makers at all stages of the decision-making process. Good lobbyists are less needed to monitor and extract information, and more needed to sort out the information and provide strategic advice.

These developments suggest that it is both much easier and more difficult to engage with the EU than in the past, and harder to predict the results. The role of lobbies and interest groups is growing in importance, which explains the pressure to make them more transparent and accountable. There is also a sense that the co-decision procedure (described later) has opened up the lobbying process, and there are certainly more lobbyists around. Lobbying is also beginning to show its darker, more ruthless side with commercial lobbies not necessarily attacking the arguments of CSOs, but the fact they are subsidized.

If the space for advocacy is larger, it is not necessarily the case that it is more effective because more and more time is taken up with coalition-building, side shows and the wider context of your particular focus. Tips for effective lobbying now tend to include the need to go beyond pursuing just the narrow objective - you have to be prepared to participate in the thinking process and the debates on cross-sectoral issues. You need to be very conscious of the institutional issues and the differences of view across different Commission department and parliamentary committees and government departments. In a wider Union, determined advocacy can work, but it may well be unexpectedly blown off course. Thinking strategically, including having fall-back plans becomes more important. In other words planning and evaluation have to be more explicit in the tips for lobbying.

Case studies by academics tend to show that where advocacy succeeds, an organisation or a group have dedicated one or more persons and financial resources specifically for that task to follow all stages in decision-making and all related events. This means that having a say in European affairs is becoming – for all the opportunities and protestations about openness – in reality much harder for smaller organisations. The would-be European lobbyist has to weigh up carefully the pros and cons of embarking on this process. The balance sheet can differ markedly from one case to the next, but the stronger the legal competence of the EU, the more likely it is to be positive.

## II. Pros and Cons of lobbying the EU

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Before deciding on a specific lobbying activity, an organisation is likely to take a broad view of the relevance of the EU and ask at least three questions:



### a. Will involvement with the EU increase our access to funding?



#### *The arguments for*

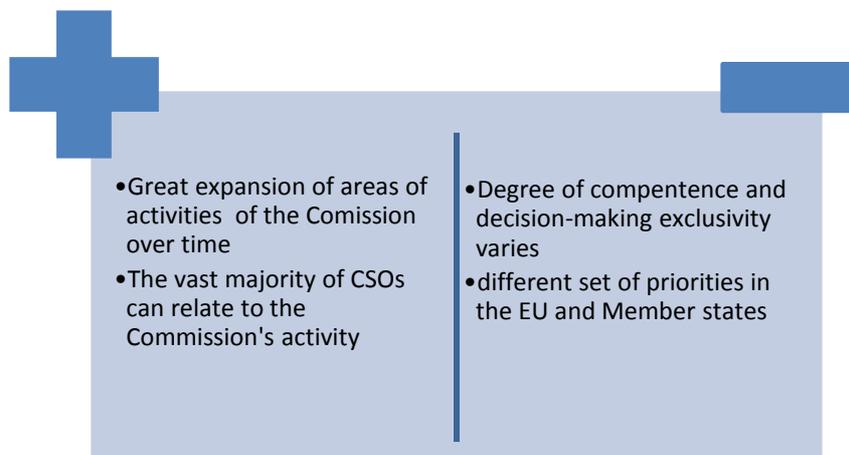
The European Commission is not a funding body but it pursues political objectives. Therefore the good lobbyist talks in Brussels not as much about money as about ideas and strategies. The more your organisation is involved in policy making, the better the chances of access to EU funding will be. EU funding opportunities have expanded significantly, so that the Commission is now the world's largest donor in developing countries, and has fast replaced other donors in new member states and

neighbouring countries. EU requirements are for innovative projects, more partnership and strict professional financial management. Ability to work with the EU can increase an organisation's capacity to manage projects, given the European added-value and experiences working with different types of organisations.

### *The arguments against*

On the other hand, EU funding opportunities requirements are too difficult for most small and medium-sized NGOs. Access barriers are high as it becomes realistic for programme managers in the Commission to supervise only a small number of larger projects. Rules in the financial regulation on management and contract compliance are in danger of making EU funding a speciality for "insiders". Criteria for funding are often pre-established in a way which makes it difficult to explore new ideas and ways of doing things. However, it is difficult to generalise since some programmes are more user friendly than others and simplified mechanisms such as lump sums and flat rates for small projects may be spreading.

## **b. Is the EU agenda relevant to our organisation?**



### *The arguments for*

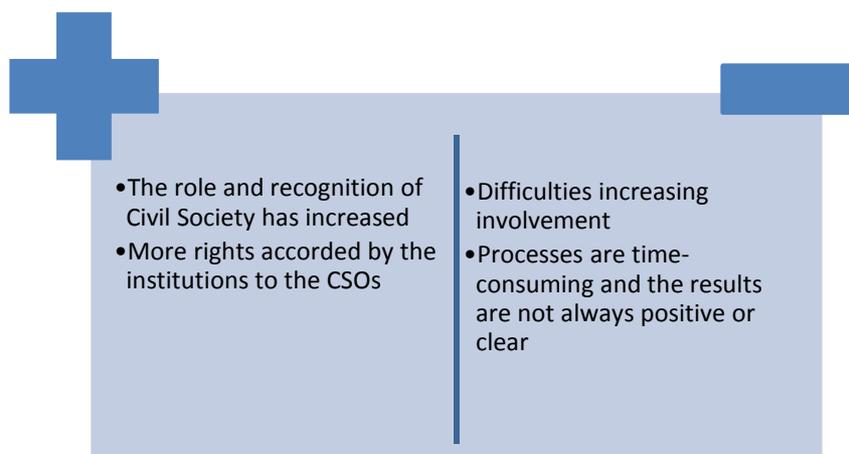
Since the Treaty of Rome, there has been an enormous expansion in the range of EU activity from free movement of people to European citizenship more generally. The narrow basis of the Treaty of Rome's article on equal pay for equal work has broadened to promote equality between men and women and the fight against all forms of discrimination. Starting with a single enabling Treaty article, the EU developed early its policies on development, environmental protection and subsequently incorporated these into the Treaties and added others, such as social policy, consumer protection,

public health, culture, education and youth. EU progress in the area of freedom, justice and security is relevant to the work of many more NGOs. Particularly since the Maastricht Treaty, in one way or another there is somewhere an EU-level activity corresponding to the concerns of almost any CSO. The Lisbon Treaty even adds other areas of interest such as civil protection and sport.

### *The arguments against*

Whilst practically every area of activity of civil society is now covered in some degree by the European Union, this can be misleading. The issue is not so much whether a subject is on the agenda, but the extent of the EU's capacity to act. In the Lisbon Treaty these areas are classified as areas of EU exclusive competence, shared competence with member states, and a series of other policies where the EU has a supporting role, but in which harmonisation of legislation is excluded. Were policy areas of interest to many CSOs such as public health, culture, or youth added to the Treaty to enlarge EU competence, or on the contrary to set strict limits on its expansion? In the Commission and European Parliament, there will always be protagonists for taking up new issues and looking for support to help promote them. Often though these CSOs might be better employed lobbying on more economic issues: i.e. within the EU, culture as a policy in its own right maybe less important than culture linked to trade or cohesion policy. EU competence to deal with health or safety issues is dependent on whether they are linked to trade, the internal market or protection of the environment. For child safety, there should be links to transport, and standards for products used by children. In other words, for many CSOs, priorities for EU action are not necessarily their number one priorities back home.

### **c. Is the EU interested in communicating with the audience we reach?**



### *The arguments for*

In the original ECAS tips for lobbying 15 years ago, we wrote that “communication between the EU Institutions and the citizen, because of the difficulties over Maastricht is on the political agenda.” Civil society is now seen once more as a way to reach the citizen. History repeated itself with the rejection of the draft Constitutional Treaty in the referenda producing similar pressures to reform as the difficult process of ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. This has led to progress towards a goal of participatory democracy at European level: better consultation standards, rules on access to documents, greater accountability and a binding Charter of fundamental rights with the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.

### *The arguments against*

Whilst civil society is seen as a potential ally for the Commission and European Parliament, as well as the Council Presidency, to create more debate about Europe, this is not always successful. For example, on some issues in the public eye, collecting over 1 million signatures can be relatively easy provided that there is a good support mechanism and array of volunteers across the Union, but on other issues it may not be easy. It is not as easy as it seems to get citizens involved with Europe. Similarly, whilst there are more opportunities of access to the EU through on-line consultations, meetings at EU level and at home, and increasing representation of CSOs on various committees, these processes are time-consuming, a burden on organisations’ resources and their practical results not always clear.

# III. 12 Tips for the Would-Be European Lobbyist

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If you can respond positively – perhaps not just for your own organisation, but for your organisation as part of a wider European association or network to at least 2 out of 3 of these general questions, then you will need to look at the scope and limits of being a successful lobbyist on a case-by-case basis.

On balance, European lobbying does pay off. Votes in the European Parliament or Council of ministers can change in a way which would never be possible in a national legislature where a government can enforce strict discipline and holds the majority. The army of lobbyists round the EU cannot all be wasting their time. The EU Institutions remain by comparison with their national counterparts much more flexible and open although access is not always equal within and between the EU Institutions. CSOs generally enjoy the best relations with Members of the European Parliament and the Commission. EU doors are open – and open to argument, which means that the opportunities are there, but need to be backed by persistence and evidence. There is therefore an important investment to be made, as the following tips underline.

## 1. Find a good lobbyist

It is not easy to find a good lobbyist, because someone who on paper has all the right qualifications may well find it bewildering and not necessarily an added adrenalin rush to work in the unstructured European lobbying environment. It is also possible that you can be a good lobbyist in theory and do all the right things but get nowhere. Maybe the strategy was wrong in the first place? Maybe the person on the front line has more of an ability to go unnoticed than to make an impression?

**A good lobbyist is results driven.** Despite the existence of lobbying schools and training programmes, lobbying is not a science or a profession. The only way is to give it a try. Nevertheless there are some qualities to spot: **a good lobbyist is determined, flexible and an extrovert.** He or she combines broad, theoretical knowledge of the inner workings of the EU with mastery of the brief and a sound understanding of the technical evidence and legal aspects. Often EU decision-makers can spot the difference between just the PR approach and someone who has a grasp of both the scope and limits in the Institutions for changing draft legislation and what is happening in the market place and society.

**A good lobbyist has to have advocacy skills in formal settings.** This means briefing and de-

**A good lobbyist has:**

- a result-driven personality
- determination, flexibility and extraversion
- good knowledge of advocacy at EU level
- excellent communication skills, both spoken and written
- good manners and a helpful attitude

briefing and organising the delegation, so that presentations and follow-ups are well structured. It also means having the ability to get the message across in one minute and hand over a paper when you meet one of the decision makers by chance in a lift or corridor of the Parliament. Lobbyists are non-hierarchical networkers – sometimes it is just as important to be in touch with the technical staff or the assistant of an MEP as with a leading politician.

**Communication skills should extend to the written word.**

The ability to adapt the message at each stage of the decision-making process, to different institutional concerns, and to translate the general message into a proposal for a specific amendment which fits the process, is essential. Key messages cannot just be repeated over and over again, but must be

constantly re-worded, adjusted and targeted to the absorption capacity of different audiences. At the same time, the good European lobbyist has to keep the wider network at national level properly informed and at each key stage prepared for the next. It is important to keep the network motivated and well-informed, but without tying them up in too much red tape and more amendments than they have time for. The good lobbyist has to have the persistence to get in early and stay the course, but also persistence, tempered with good manners and a helpful attitude. For example, it is not a good idea to interrupt other people’s conversations, go to an office without fixing an appointment, or try to stop a Member of the European Parliament on their way to a vote.

Why insist on the qualifications for the good lobbyist? It is because case studies suggest that where organisations find the resources to make someone responsible for lobbying at all stages at the decision-making process the campaign is more likely to succeed (cf. tip no. 10 on finding the necessary resources).

## **2. Adjust your strategy to what can be achieved realistically through the EU**

**It is crucial to be very conscious of the issues around, “competencies of the EU”, and “legal basis” and adjust your strategy accordingly.** It is not easy for NGOs to understand why the EU focuses more time on toy safety, than highlighting child poverty or is competent to deal with some diseases and not others. Competence is strongest where it has been expanded from the economic foundations and the internal market to areas such as consumer and environmental protection, free movement of persons and non-discrimination in general often as a result of decisions by the

European court of Justice or interpretation of the original Treaty articles to meet more modern societal concerns.

Where the EU has been less successful is the adding on of entirely new policy areas, where Treaty articles are often weak and preclude legislation. Depending on their area of activity, CSOs often face the difficulty that their message can only with great difficulty be translated into action by the EU, and is therefore received frequently with incomprehension by officials. They therefore have to adjust their strategy and argue links for example between the internal market and the free movement of persons, and demonstrate how their demands can be implemented. Such tests are less stringent for non-legislative action. Many EU projects, and reform programmes in accession or neighbouring countries often address a far wider range of internal policies of the state than could be in the competence of the EU as a legislator (i.e. general protection of human rights, policing or the independence of the judiciary). Strategy should, however, as a general rule, follow the advice that the narrower objective for the EU is likely to work better than the broader, all-embracing one.

Find out in what ways the EU has legal competences on your issue and adjust your strategy correspondingly

### 3. Create a European association or network to operate in relation to the EU Institutions and across the Union

With the expansion of the numbers of lobbyists and requests to be heard, European associations have become once more the privileged interlocutors of the EU Institutions. With increasing competition for attention, there are signs that Commission officials and MEPs are having to be more selective about their open door policy, and give preference to those they know and trust and where possible to delegations aggregating points of view across several member states. In any case, in a Union of 27 member states, an effective lobby cannot be confined to having an office in Brussels to

For better results, advocate both at European and member state level, also in those countries who are against or indifferent to your issue

represent the members towards the EU Institutions, important though this remains. **European-level advocacy has to be backed up by active national representations in at least two-thirds of the member states**, including new members which are still under-represented in European umbrella groups. The organisations in the country planning or holding the Presidency of the Council have a special responsibility to further the interests of the group as a whole. Often MEPs or officials will say that they have

seen the evidence of lobbying by an NGO in their own country but are told by colleagues from other countries that there is no such evidence there. **It is therefore vital to campaign not just in the countries which are supportive anyway, but also in those which are against or indifferent.** The European association has to be sufficiently strong and disciplined to convey the

same message at the same time through its national members to their governments at key stages of the decision-making process.

#### 4. Participate in the consultative process

It is important for at least the European association or network to which you belong to participate in official consultation processes launched by the Commission through “Your Voice in Europe”. Their significance varies. It may be a quick, rather formalistic process, from which the European Commission expects to hear little new because it has already decided its approach in advance. Nevertheless, **it is important to participate because that is the first question the desk officer will ask the visiting delegation**. If you did not notice the consultation process, it may count against you. But, what can be gained? Sometimes consultation processes on more political issues are important. For example, the Commission has asked for opinions on the future of the EU budget and expenditure priorities after the current financial framework 2007-2013 and appears to have a relatively open mind on the options. A significant response, both in qualitative and quantitative terms from NGOs would be desirable, if only because on such issues there will be significant input from member states, regions, industry federations, and think tanks. It is equally important to participate in hearings in the European Parliament or consultations organised by national governments or parliaments. But, it is very important not to regard consultation as the end of the story. The resources available to the Commission to follow up consultations and incorporate its results in proposals are often insufficient, so that this is a quickly forgotten stage in the decision-making process.

Participate in EU consultations. They can be a great tool to be formally introduced in policy-making. You can use this evidence later when lobbying

#### 5. Support lobbying by evidence across the Union

**The provision of objective, reliable and well-researched evidence from across the Union is the key to successful lobbying and it will distinguish your lobby from others who just provide wish lists**. EU legislators are relatively open-minded and can be persuaded by arguments, well supported by the facts. They tend to be less impressed than a national legislator might be by your position as an organisation. The tendency for position papers to be rhetorical, procedural and abstract means that those representing real case histories, facts and figures are read with more interest. They are also more likely to be picked up by the press (see below). This means using evidence which will explain the likely impact of particular measures: opinion polls or more qualitative ways of assessing citizens’ views, through European comparative tests and surveys (i.e. measuring the carbon foot-print, child poverty, trafficking in persons, the increase in allergies etc).

The question arises of whether European projects could not be planned to link with the policy-making and legislative process. CSOs make a distinction between their service delivery operations and their advocacy functions: for effective European lobbying, the two should come together. For example, the Commission itself recognises that CSOs need more access to scientific research to support their advocacy role and has introduced a “civil society instrument” to the EU framework programme for research and development. Alliances between CSOs and academics can be effective in such circumstances. European surveys can be useful back home too, revealing to the government where their performance is above average and where they are behind their European neighbours.

**Proving sound facts and figures - and linking these with real case stories - will increase your chances of success**

## **6. Get in early and stay in**

This original ECAS tip still holds good and despite the possibilities of following the EU at a distance on the internet and by email, it goes together with the idea that you still have to be on the spot or represented in Brussels to lobby the EU effectively. Don't be fooled: by the time an initiative is announced and a consultation procedure launched on the Europa website, it is already a bit late and the Commission will have a good idea of the scope and limits of the proposed policy or legislation. A policy of flying in and flying out of Brussels does not work either because there is little advance warning of what is on the agenda for meetings of experts or parliamentary committees with items often shifted at the last minute.

**The advantage of getting in early is that at the start of the process very few people, other departments, committees or outside interests are involved.** However, as the issue progresses within the Institutions more people do progressively become involved and there is more competition for attention. This is true, not only of the European Commission, but also of the other Institutions. It is important not only to get in early, but also to stay in otherwise it is assumed you have lost interest and your arguments may be forgotten. As already pointed out, this is not always possible, if only because of constraints on resources. The difficulty in addition is that parts of the decision-making process when the main protagonists meet informally to prepare compromise texts or during the conciliation procedure between the Council and the European Parliament are opaque and unpredictable. The heavy co-decision procedure has put pressure on the three Institutions to strike a “deal” on the “package” before the first reading in the parliament. This is a good idea to gain time but often at the expense of transparency. So if you cannot follow all the stages in the decision-making process, you may well need to think hard in order not to waste opportunities (more detailed descriptions of the decision-making process and what to do at each stage are provided under Section V of this document).

**Set a foot in Brussels - be always present where the action takes place, even in informal events**

## 7. Make more use of EU complaints procedures to back-up your cause

In “50 questions and answers about citizens and the Treaty of Rome”, we have analysed the different official mechanisms the EU Institutions have set up to deal with complaints and petitions or requests for documents. Some European association representatives in regular contact with the

**In case of need, formal channels of complaint can give your cause more visibility and credibility**

Institutions may argue that official channels of complaint should be avoided and that it would be better for good cooperation to make informal requests. This may well be the case, and one should at least inform your regular interlocutors of what you are doing rather than going behind their backs. **On the other hand, possibilities under the regulation on access to documents are underused by citizens and civil society.** The same applies to requests to the European Ombudsman to ascertain maladministration by the Institutions or petitions to the European Parliament. Complaints to the Commission or action before national courts are also rare for NGOs. These non-judicial, quasi-judicial or judicial remedies are slow and cumbersome. On the other hand, an organisation prepared to consider using these procedures will often earn respect and support if the case is well founded. **The formal procedure can provide backing by making your arguments better known to the Institutions.** They become accountable under an obligation to reply and explain their position. The EU is very much a legal construction and legal based. These rules are there for citizens and not just member states or EU Institutions. The scope for using them effectively will be increased now the Charter of fundamental rights is legally binding.

## 8. Form alliances, build coalitions

**With increasing competition for attention, and also to provide a counterweight to more powerful lobbies, it makes sense to cooperate with others and form coalitions.** On issues of general policy which cut across different sectors – i.e. the debate on the future of the EU budget, Treaty reforms, EU policies on communication with citizens, it is in the nature of the subject that coalitions would be desirable. They are not always easy to establish because organisations with a very different legal status may be involved: NGOs, think tanks, communication specialists. On other cross-cutting questions such as climate change, migration policy, EU cohesion or neighbourhood policy, networking and coalition building are essential. Often it is a question of a coalition across a single sector when the EU is considering for example a new social action, public health or a cultural programme. Among NGOs, the European level coalition building mechanisms exist in the broad sectoral groupings making up the civil society contact group.

It may well be prudent to consider coalitions as flexible and temporary. They may work to reinforce shared general concerns – but not so well to support a technical detail of specific concern only to some members of the group. There has to be a clear understanding that it is sometimes better to work together, particularly at high points for the joint campaign, sometimes separately. Coalitions may be cumbersome, but they can be more than the sum of their respective strengths (i.e. some organisations have technical know-how, whilst others have better links to the Institutions and a third group a good data base and communication skills).

**Coalitions reinforce your weight within the Institutions, however keep in mind that they work better for general concerns than for smaller details or technicalities**

Members of the European Parliament, and in particular the Rapporteur will often prefer to see groups working together and reaching compromises, rather than being asked to arbitrate between different demands. It is a good idea to keep an eye on opposing coalitions and lobbies: if they are being particularly active and forming coalitions, you should probably do so too!

## 9. Make a noise to be seen and heard

The factors already mentioned of increased competition for attention from the EU Institutions coupled with the latter's increasingly overcrowded agenda means that it is more and more important to attract media and public attention. In turn, there is increased competition from other groups and events, also looking for attention. This means that something more than just standard public relations is required. **Press briefings, fringe meetings with MEPs, visual gimmicks, exhibitions in the European Parliament buildings, or advertising messages are so frequent they will go unnoticed unless their message is original.** Examples of more original, eye catching attention-seeking techniques include: putting a boat out round the European Parliament buildings in Strasbourg, measuring pollution levels outside the buildings in Brussels, testing MEPs' blood to increase diabetes awareness, erecting a lighthouse outside a Council meeting on saving fish stocks.

**A more research-based approach also works. What can interest the press and also support advocacy is reliable evidence collated across the**

**Either through creative or research-based advocacy, dare to be eye-catching. Be original and well-documented**

**Union.** This allows journalists to paint a European picture, but also to pick out for their audience statistics relevant to their country and its place in the league table. Innovative techniques such as citizens' panels or deliberative polls will attract press attention, because they relate the European Union to the everyday lives of citizens through the testimony of citizens themselves. The 1000 strong press corps accredited to the EU is the largest outside Washington, but very much

centred in its activity like foreign or political correspondents on the work of the Institutions and ministerial meetings. Therefore they would have to sell your story to their editor as having some real additional value – a new angle on an EU activity. Access to the media for CSOs is easier than for commercial interests, and they should maximise this advantage. European and national officials or

MEPs will tend to read briefings coming from groups which have been mentioned in the press rather than ones which appear purely anonymous.

## 10. Find the resources to lobby effectively

CSOs often assume that industries having recourse to consultants and expense accounts have limitless resources for lobbying. This is not true except if their markets are likely to be affected either positively or negatively by a particular regulatory standard. It is difficult for more scattered interests only partially or indirectly affected or people campaigning for a more general interest to match the financial power of the narrow vested interest at stake. Industry lobbies often complain, that CSOs have an unfair advantage through grants or subsidies, but this is not strictly true either. Grants are more and more for programmed activities and not a blank cheque for lobbying. For all lobbies resources are a problem especially with pressure from within the EU decision-making process to get in early and stay the course.

Money makes lobbying go round - establish a strategy for fundraising, such eg members' contributions or foundations' donations

Funding for advocacy is the exception rather the rule. Most funders prefer to fund service delivery or awareness raising activities, so that resources for lobbying may be part of a larger project or come from special parts of the budgets. **The most obvious source are members' contributions or special campaigns for which public appeals are made.** As suggested already, there is a potential link from evidence from projects to lobbying but this would only cover a part of the costs. **Another possibility is to approach the Trusts or Foundations** which have chosen to fund causes, campaigns or advocacy, but these are in a minority. From a civil society perspective, **greater transparency in funding for lobbying should alert decision-makers to the danger of powerful vested interests being able to buy influence.** It may be possible also to argue for a change in approach on the part of foundations and other funders. After all, a legislative clause which has to be implemented by 27 member states may affect a greater number of people and do more for social or environmental protection than the sum total of grass roots projects. But in turn this requires as professional an approach to advocacy as to project management.

## 11. Develop a game plan

**It is essential to develop a game plan because a compromise has to be found between the need to cover all stages of the decision-making process and the resources available.** Sharing costs through coalition building could help achieve this balance. As already indicated, this game plan should begin with a critical assessment of what is desirable compared to what is achievable, and the margin for manoeuvre. This discipline is also necessary to counteract the

tendency to concentrate contacts on decision-makers and legislators who are trusted allies and likely to support your cause rather than approach those undecided or hostile to your position.

**It is a good idea to produce a checklist of what to do at each stage of the decision-making process and whom to contact when.** Well before the Commission makes a formal proposal, a

**Be realistic about what you can get with the resources you have - have a structured approach with room for manoeuvre**

reasonable assessment can be made on the basis of precedent of the likely position of member states and the chances of a favourable majority. There is also generally an indication in the Commission and Council Presidency programmes of a timetable for the adoption by the Commission, the opinion of the Parliament and the Council's deliberations. The unpredictable nature of EU decision-making has also been stressed. The game plan should be reviewed and adjusted at each stage.

One of the biggest obstacles to success which needs careful consideration is that the position of the European association and its members may well be much stronger in the member states which are in any case favourable to the EU initiative. Raising the issue in member states which are more sceptical or where it is simply not on the political agenda depends on the ability to generate additional support at national level. Campaigners often fail to see that at some stage a compromise which is the best that can be achieved, has to be supported even if it falls short of their original objective.

## 12. Evaluate your lobbying activities

There is increasing emphasis as the lobbying agenda becomes more unpredictable and crowded **on having a clear strategy and building evaluation in from the outset.** In some cases, the results of lobbying can be tangible. But, these are rarely measured. For example, studies by academics often report claims about how successful lobbying was in promoting changes to legislation. But such claims are rarely cross-checked with evidence of which amendments were accepted, which were not. Maybe the strategy was unrealistic in the first place, or badly implemented so that lessons could be learned about how to do it differently next time. Also funders and the governing body of the European associations would like to know what succeeded, and what did not.

**Whether your strategy has worked or not, do not miss the opportunity to learn from the process and do better in the future**

The evaluation tools should not however be only focused on measurable results. There are intangible benefits from working together in a European lobby: it can help build cohesion within the

group across Europe, and be a real support for smaller organizations; the profile of the group may have improved through media coverage; a number of useful contacts would have been made; “Brussels” is sometimes more of an “ideas factory” than a decision-making centre and engagement with the EU can build knowledge within organizations and help spread best practices.



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