JOINING THE COCKTAIL CIRCUIT: SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS AT THE EUROPEAN UNION[*]

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Although social movement organizations have established themselves successfully on the European level, there is dispute whether the European Union is conducive or detrimental to movement politics. One view is that the EU's particular opportunity structures and styles of policy making subvert unconventional forms of action and participation, thus transforming social movements into a fragmented field of individual interest groups and lobbies. This article critically assesses this perspective. It traces these processes, showing that they were indeed part and parcel of the gradual Europeanization of social movements during the 1970s and 1980s. It then presents evidence that, in the aftermath of the Single European Act of 1986, the European movement sector began moving towards a more integrated multi-level structure. Data drawn from interviews with Euro-level movement activists and EU functionaries present a picture of this new interorganizational structure and multi-level action forms with reference to the European groups working on environmental protection, and human and social rights. It is argued that the present developments stress sectorial and cross-sectorial networking, self-regulation, and common policy deliberation.

European integration and the building of the European Community have been advancing largely without the participation of social movements. From the Paris and Rome Treaties of 1951 and 1957 until the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986, European integration always has been spearheaded by political and economic elites. Indeed, any progress depended entirely on the ability of the architects of the European Union to commit these elites to their cause. It is well-known, for instance, that the process of European integration, which lost force in the seventies and gave rise to a general Euro-skepticism, was revigorated again by the project of a monetary and economic union (Sandholtz and Zysman 1989, Sandholtz 1993), which drew heavy support and commitment from economic elites (Streeck 1998).

European integration has always been conceived as a process that depends on the support of important societal interests. The European institutions, and especially the European Commission, showed particular commitment to assist these interests in building up European associations and federations that would serve as interlocutors and supporters of European policy (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1997). The first round of interest group formation accompanied the Paris and Rome Treaties, resulting in 232 associations (Pfeifer 1995: 33-8), most of them European trade associations (e.g., UNICE and EUROCHAMBRES). Also, newly established associations of the farmers (COPA and COGECA) played a crucial role in establishing the European agricultural policy, while unions and consumer associations (e.g., BEUC) played a minor role. A second wave of interest group formation arrived with the SEA,

particularly with the establishment of sectorial associations, direct representations (individual companies, public or state administrations), nongovernmental organizations, and professional consultants (Lahusen 2003). Between 1988 and 1991, for instance, the number of lobbyists working with the European Parliament had increased from 300 to 3,000. And a survey of the European Commission in the early 1990s estimated 1,000 to 3,000 interest groups and up to 10,000 lobbyists (Pfeifer 1995: 41).

Most of the social movement organizations (SMOs) working at the European Union were established during this second wave. This Europeanization was basically a reaction to the increasing importance of European policies and the general rush towards Brussels. The European-level institutions were more open and responsive than their national counterparts, and provided movement organizations with a further incentive to become "European" (Rucht 1993, Imig and Tarrow 1999). Undoubtedly, these organizations came to Brussels with a large number of other interests, and were but a small, understaffed, and underresourced fraction within the encompassing pressure-group sector.[1] However, over the past ten to fifteen years Euro-SMOs have gradually established themselves and built up stable working relations with the institutions of the European Union (EU). Moreover, they have found ways of cooperating efficiently and influencing decision-making procedures effectively (Pedler and van Schendelen 1994, Helfferich and Kolb 2001).

While most scholars agree that social movements have established themselves successfully on the European level (always considering their relative weight and power), there are few insights into the consequences of this process (e.g., Marks and McAdam 1999; Imig and Tarrow 2001). On the one hand, it is debated whether the European Union is conducive or detrimental to movement politics. Most frequently it is argued that the institutionalization of European SMOs is part of the EU's political opportunity structure, and leads to the gradual transformation of SMOs into interest groups and lobbies (Tarrow 1995, Marks and McAdam 1999). On the other hand, it may be that the EU encourages increasing fragmentation of societal interest representation (Kohler-Koch 1997b), and the complementary advent of shifting and fragile ad-hoc alliances (Pedler and van Schendelen 1994). It could be argued that the opportunity structure of the European polity fragments the organizational field, stimulates internal competition (Richardson 2001), and favors the creation of a market of interest groups that impede the building of stable movement networks. These views have been discussed widely by political scientists looking at interest group representation, but less so by social movement scholars.

If we define social movements as informal networks based on shared beliefs and solidarities that are geared towards mobilizing unconventional collective action (della Porta and Diani 1999: 16, Diani 1992), these two perspectives portray a pessimistic picture for European-level SMOs. In fact, it seems that the more individual SMOs establish themselves successfully on the European level—and the more they open "windows of opportunity" for other social movements (e.g., by providing examples, opening venues, enlarging participation rights)—the more likely the movement quality of their activities erodes. This is because SMOs must adapt to institutionalized channels to do their advocacy work, which tends to decouple them from their grassroots.

This article aims to assess critically these issues. It argues that while a bleak picture for social movements seems warranted, this view needs qualification in light of a more comprehensive view of the European SMO field. For this purpose, the first and second sections will illustrate the gradual transformation of the European NGO field from a fragmented, instrumental structure into a more integrated and deliberative one. The third section then expands this structural argument by describing the multilevel structure of EU governance in order to better understand the hybrid nature of many European advocacy groups and their action repertoires. The analysis focuses exclusively on organizations working on environmental, human rights, and social justice issues because most EU organizations tend to concentrate in these policy areas. The findings are based on a research project that looked

at interest groups and interest intermediation in Brussels using documents and interviews as data sources. The interviews were conducted with representatives of the European institutions (Parliament, Commission, and Council of Ministers), with interest groups and professional consultancies, and finally with activists in SMOs and advocacy groups. Specifically, we spoke with people from the European Unit of Greenpeace International, the European bureau of Amnesty International and of Human Rights Watch, the European Women's Lobby, the European Environmental Bureau, the European Network of Social NGOs, and the European Poverty Network.

The fieldwork emphasized advocacy strategies and the working relationships between European institutions, interest groups, and SMOs. Interviews and documents were analyzed in order to highlight the interorganizational relations between the groups active on the European level. Thirty interviews were conducted according to a non-standardized questionnaire, which was then analyzed using qualitative, interpretative methods of text analysis. Our questionnaire comprised several questions on the organization itself, its relations to the broader social movement on the local and national level, and the interorganizational relations with other SMOs. Moreover, additional questions gathered information on the working contacts with the European institutions and potential allies or opponents, the strategies and tactics used in representing their issues and conceiving of campaigns. Finally, respondents were asked to assess the structure of European policy making and the policy communities active in Brussels.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNIES AND ACCOMMODATIVE PRESSURES

Social movement scholarship tends to explain the assumed weakening of Euro-level activism by reference to the political opportunity structure of the EU (Marks and McAdam 1999, Tarrow 1995 2001). Indeed, it is rather uncontroversial to argue that political opportunity structures have an impact on organizations and mobilizing structures (Kriesi 1996, Tarrow 1996), given the fact that SMOs had to adapt to the established patterns of European politics. However, particularly in the case of the EU, we cannot speak of a uniform and formalized assimilation but of an undeclared and elastic accommodation (Mazey and Richardson 1999). First, this is due to the institutional complexity of the EU, which comprises both intergovernmental and supranational elements (e.g., the Council of Ministers and the European Commission). Second, uniform and formalized assimilative pressures are lacking because of the diversity of member states and their policy styles, and because politics are strongly sectorialized into different policy fields and communities (Nugent 1999, Richardson 1996). Third, the EU has a pronounced multilevel structure because member states still are the ultimate decision makers (e.g., via the Council on Ministers). Interest representation and collective protest have to operate in all relevant arenas, which leads to a multifaceted and complex action repertoires. Fourth, the relations between EU institutions and societal interest are not greatly formalized, which allows for cooperative and flexible relations. This is certainly true for the European Parliament (Kohler-Koch 1997a), which has been a privileged interlocutor for NGOs, and also for the European Commission, whose "leading role in policy making and implementation has become dependent upon the institutionalized involvement of private interests" (McLaughlin and Greenwood 1995: 147, Mazey and Richardson 1994).[2]

These observations reinforce the characterization that policy participants make of the "Brussels community" as "an insider's town" (Nugent 1999). Particularly those lobbyists who have worked in Brussels for a few years agree that the European polity consists of a fairly small community of functionaries or parliamentarians on the one hand, and of lobbyists on the other. In fact, although several thousand lobbyists and functionaries are located in Brussels, people still tend to run into each another. Moreover, they are in regular contact with each other through the many meetings, working dinners, and receptions, engaging in what Caroline Walcot of the European Round Table of Industrialists called the Brussels "cocktail circuit."

The polity is even smaller if one considers that it divides itself into different "policy communities" (Mazey and Richardson 1999, Nugent 1999) or "policy networks" (Schneider 1994: 67) that deal with different policy fields and issues. Moreover, personal and profess-sional networks are built along the different nationalities present in Brussels. Dominique Souchoun from the farmers' association COPA describes the community as follows:

> I've been here for thirty years, and, in fact, you finally get to know a lot of people. Especially if you have gone through the same schools. [...] Basically, our world is very small. And, also, it's a very particular world since we have to consider the nationalities as well. Frequently, the Danes stay with the Danes. [...] And the Finnish even more so. [...] Yes, it's a small world indeed [...] as we have 10,000 lobbyists and fifteen different nationalities. Moreover, there are about twenty-four Directorate-Generals [within the Commission] or so. In the end, this makes up relatively few people after all.

Parliamentary committees and the different Directorate-Generales (DGs) of the Commission play an important role in these policy communities because they are eager to strengthen the position of their own people, mainly through supporting them financially and organizationally in the establishment and maintenance of proper European associations (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1997). Moreover, European institutions have been particularly concerned with fostering cooperation with voluntary associations or non-governmental organizations by means of the so-called "civil dialogue."[3] For example, the European Social Policy Forums of 1996 and 1998 were very inclusive, drawing more than 1,000 NGOs at the first conference.

Any European lobbyist or activist knows that it is crucial to build up informal working relationships with the institutions of the EU (Mazey and Richardson 1999; van Schendelen 2002). Given the fact that consultation is not a formally guaranteed right but rather an informally granted privilege, there are good chances for individual groups to be fully integrated into a particular policy community as soon as trust and credibility are built up. According to Lotte Leicht, a full-time activist for Human Rights Watch,

> I think in the beginning, we had the situation where we were basically running around knocking on doors. And that has definitely changed. It's as much the other way round now, where we get calls from both defense, foreign ministries, prime ministries, to ask for information and to ask for a particular clarification, or suggestions on how to deal with certain matters.

This preferential treatment has particular importance in a system of informal consultations, because it guarantees that one is fully informed and consulted early. However, these informal consultative relations are built on a series of specific presuppositions and expectations about reasonable and sensitive working relationships that favor conventional forms of interest representation.

INTERORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS:
MOVEMENT NETWORKS OR INTEREST MARKETS?

The Europeanization of SMOs has evolved far less orderly than the development of European interest groups. In the latter case, the establishment of European trade associations from the 1950s onwards was complemented by the founding of sectorial coalitions and associations as well as of many direct company representations in the 1980s and 1990s (Greenwood 2003). In the case of social movements this sequence does not apply. Most European peak federations

were established rather late during the 1970s or 1980s, and many international SMOs became active during the same period. Moreover, many SMOs were involved in European politics long before establishing their own offices in Brussels, e.g., in the case of Amnesty International, which operated before 1985 through it's Belgian offices.

According to the EU database Coneccs (Consultation, the European Commission and Civil Society), there are 115 organizations working in the area of environmental policies, and 114 groups in human and social rights.[4] Fifty of these organizations are politically oriented, contentious NGOs and SMOs, that is, having ties neither to government, industry, professional groups, or welfare organizations. Almost all of them are European associations, coalitions, or European branches of transnational SMOs with their own offices in Brussels. As shown in table 1, most were established during the 1980s and 1990s, and especially between 1985 and 1992. The establishment of no less than eighteen new organizations was associated with SEA of 1986 and the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which both brought substantial progress to European integration. Environmental organizations became active primarily during the eighties, reflecting the increasing prominence of environmental concerns during these years.[5] The growing number of social NGOs also indicates that the EU was becoming more actively engaged in foreign and social policy, in spite of the reservations of many member states against a "European welfare state." Again, it was particularly the Commission's Social Policy Directorate General (DG V) that started to support voluntary associations, welfare organizations, and social NGOs from 1995 onwards as an important element of a common European social policy—not least by means of the so-called "civil dialogue."

Table 1. The Development of the European NGO Sector

Policy Arena	Year of establishment				Total
	Before 1971	1971 – 1980	1981 – 1990	1991 and after	
Environmental NGOs	2	2	6	2	12
Human and Social Rights NGOs	5	5	10	13	33
Total	7	7	16	15	45[a]

[a] In five cases we have no information on the year of establishment

Among these different NGOs we can distinguish three organizational formats. First, there are twelve peak associations and federations (e.g., the European Environmental Bureau or the European Women's Lobby), which work on a broader range of issues and follow a more conventional and hierarchical structure of interest representation. Second, we have fourteen European coalition advocacy networks (e.g., the Climate Network Europe or the European Anti-Poverty Network). These organizations focus on specific issues and lay more emphasis on the coordination of their members' activism. Third, there are about fifteen international SMOs with European offices that serve as a liaison with the EU institutions—amongst them Amnesty International, Friends of the Earth, and Greenpeace International.[6]

These organizations exist side by side in all different policy areas, even to the extent that transnational SMOs are not members of the corresponding European peak federations or networks. This is particularly the case with the environmentalist SMOs working in Brussels—not one is a member of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), although some of their national branches are (e.g., the British section of Friends of the Earth and WWF). Moreover,

the SMO direct representations in Brussels have staffing support, membership, and public recognition that is comparable to the EEB (e.g., the European unit of Greenpeace International). Indeed, even if international SMOs belong to a peak association, they tend to invest their resources into their own European bureau—a "dilemma of the peak associations" that makes them poorer than some of their members (Hey and Brendle 1994: 401). This dilemma has three implications for the European peak associations. First, their mandate tends to be restricted to broader, encompassing issues and tasks that are relevant to the whole movement, and do not interfere with the "sectorial" work of member organizations or networks. Second, the European peak associations become the primary medium of interest representation for all those groups not present in Brussels—including those national sections and local groups that belong to international SMOs but want to have a say themselves on the European level. Third, in regard to their jurisdictional claims the European peak associations tend ever more to specialize in particular campaign issues or tools. They no longer make claims of a "monopoly of representation," and commonly enter into a partnership-oriented division of labor with the other organizations active at the European level.

The international SMOs, for their part, are reluctant to engage too much in these Euro-groups, but use them rather as one tactical option within a multi-voice strategy (Mazey and Richardson 1999). This has to do, first, with diverging goals and action repertoires. Second, SMOs aim to safeguard their organizational functioning by prioritizing the use of their personnel and resources for their own purposes. Third, SMOs depending on media attention and public support will be particularly uncomfortable participating too much in European peak associations or coalition advocacy networks. This is the case above all with Greenpeace. Accorrding to Hans Wolters, of the EU unit of Greenpeace, his organization depends on,

> ... individual donations and subsidies from other organizations. So we have to be visible in order to safeguard our support. [...] There is, of course, the Climate Network Europe, which is very knowledgeable, a real expert on climate. Of course, we could say also as NGOs, 'There exists this Climate Network, so ... there is no need to work on climate.' But our members want Greenpeace to be involved with climate, because that is an issue that concerns people. And maybe people expect Greenpeace to do things on that, and not only on the Amazon, not only on whales, and so on. Consequently, we are in a way in competition with others.

Finally, this competitive element is true also for information dissemination and "factual lobbying," as these organizations compete for political influence. This was acknowledged, for instance, by Regine Schneider of EEB.

> Competition certainly does exist. I mean, not least of all with regard to the Commission's guidelines, that's clear. I would say, however, that, to a certain extent, competition is healthy indeed. And when it really matters, we have to point out that we support each other and work together. So, I myself would in no way call this confusion.

Consequently, the field of European SMOs and advocacy groups experiences a number of "redundancies" (Grant 1995: 118-9) in the sense of generating various organizations working on similar issues. Moreover, this field is becoming increasingly pluralist, fragmented, and competitive—demonstrating the same tendencies that interest-group research generally has observed (Kohler-Koch 1997b, Kohler-Koch 1994, Pedler and van Schendelen 1994). In fact, the relations between EU institutions and societal interests are departing from the neocorporatist structure of the early stages of European integration and are

moving towards a more pluralist and competitive structure (Streeck and Schmitter 1991; Streeck 1998). This is because, on the one hand, the number of societal interests active at the European level is increasing. On the other hand, this fragmentation and competitiveness is also due largely to institutional changes of EU governance under way since the late 1980s.

First, the funding practices of the European institutions have been under review. As voiced in interviews with staff members of the EEB, European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), and the Platform of European Social NGOs, these changes have especially affected the peak associations that depended on European money. Traditionally, EU institutions have provided funds to safeguard the maintenance of the peak associations (so-called "core funding"), but in the 1990s more and more money was shifted to specific projects (so-called "project funding"), whether for research and data collection or for providing services such as antipoverty programs. These changes have brought about a far more competitive system of funding. Moreover, it augments the annual workload of the advocacy groups and increases organizational uncertainty. "This makes it very difficult for organizations to engage in long-term strategic planning and to promote good management and personnel practices" (Platform of European Social NGOs 1999: 5). Paradoxically, this situation favors SMOs that raise their funds autonomously and do not depend on European support (e.g., WWF, Greenpeace, and Amnesty International). At the same time, it hits peak associations the hardest because they are less capable of controlling the field of European advocacy work (i.e., EEB social networks).

Second, fragmentation and competitiveness is attributed also to policy changes in the aftermath of the SEA of 1986. European integration gained new momentum at that time for three reasons: (1) more policy fields were regulated by the EU; (2) more of them were subjected to majority rule—thus reinforcing regulatory action; and (3) because many cross-sectorial matters related to economic and monetary union (e.g., consumer, environment, labor) were included into the political agendas (Richardson 2001). This called for a stronger coordination among the different policy fields and the respective parliamentary committees and DGs. Consequently, many agendas that were under the purview of policy communities before were opened for renegotiation. While this process has not mitigated the "sectorialization" of European policy making according to distinct policy fields and communities (Nugent 1999), it has increased competitiveness, forcing SMOs and advocacy groups to engage into more comprehensive lobbying and coalition building across a wider range of policy areas.

These developments are challenging the Brussels activist community by transforming interorganizational networks into markets of interests competing for resources and influence. This development is detrimental to movement politics because social movements depend heavily on informal networks of interaction and a shared consensus formation. As scholars have observed, social movements develop common interests and claims, define problems, and consider, strategies, solidarities, and belief systems among a diversity of different groups (Melucci 1988, Diani 1992, Klandermans 1988, Offe and Wiesenthal 1980). This is particularly true for the European Union because SMOs and advocacy groups have to specify the European dimension of their claims and campaigns— "transnational interest formation," according to Helfferich and Kolb (2001: 233). Also, they have to pinpoint common forms of action and organization among a variety of national and local movements. This becomes even more relevant when they enter into "advocacy coalitions" (Sabatier 1988) where activists can develop their European positions and claims.

TOWARDS GREATER INTEGRATION

Fragmentation and competitive relations have restricted a "cooperative" and/or "collective transnationalism" (Imig and Tarrow 2001a: 23) from emerging at the EU level. However, it appears that in reaction to the deficiencies of the informal system, the Brussels activist community is moving towards more structured and integrated relationships. Activists complain

that the consultation process is very arbitrary or, at best, very random. According to Lotte Leicht of Human Rights Watch, "First of all, it [the system] is random, it depends on whatever contacts they have, and what they feel what is good to ask." Another respondent, Sandrine Grenier of the Platform of European Social NGOs, puts it this way: "And it's true that we sometimes see that certain associations have been invited—some of our members—while others aren't. So why? How? And according to what criteria?" Similar opinions were voiced by other activists in Euro-groups. The general observation is that they are victims of these consultative practices and losing their "monopoly of representation." In fact, given the lack of transparent and formalized procedures, the more organizations are active on the European level, the less orderly the consultative process will be.

Since the 1990s European activists increasingly have been demanding reform of the European institutions' consultative practices. In particular, they are asking that pertinent information be publicly available and that a formal procedure be established to provide all groups the same opportunity. According to Lotte Leicht of Human Rights Watch, this would stop

> ... the elitist way of going to the big ones, and secondly it gets away from a closed process where it's only the closest allies and friends involved. That's an unhealthy process for any democratic-based institution, and I think it's missing out on maybe a lot of good information that could be available from national NGOs

So far the EU institutions have not formalized their consultation procedures substantially. Although the European Parliament moved a bit in this direction in the early 1990s by demanding a formal registration and instituting a code of conduct, the Commission still defends the "self-regulatory model" (McLaughlin and Greenwood 1995) because it is worried about slowing down even more EU decision-making processes. Under these circumstances some advocacy groups have taken remedial action themselves. First, they have deepened and broadened their own contacts with the European institutions in order to be consulted fully and early. Even then, some organizations have engaged in tackling the problems and constraints collectively. They have established platforms (or forums) for exchanging information and coordinating their specific initiatives and campaigns in which all member groups are involved equally. For instance, the informal Human Rights Contact Group was set up in 1995 by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme. Also, there is the informal G-8 meeting of all environmental organizations present in Brussels. The members of the G-8 group are the EEB, international organizations such as Greenpeace International, Friends of the Earth, WWF (the European coordination bureau), and four sectorial groups (e.g., Transport, Environment, Birdlife International and the Climate Network Europe). According to one respondent from EEB:

> So we hold regular meetings to exchange information for, as we said before, we are often not able to get hold of all the information quickly enough to inform each other about our respective positions. Moreover, each organization has its special domains of concern. (Regine Schneider, EEB).

There is also a contact group of the European consumer organization. In the words of Caroline Naet from EURO COOP, a general trend is discernible.

> There's a new trend now on the European level which is to have dialogue. And the meeting this morning was about dialogue and the financial services. So, there, four European consumer organizations go together and

one joint group where we're speaking in one voice. And we have this negotiation or dialogue with the financial services industry on mortgage credits.

There are also formalized forums, like the Development Liaison Committee, the Migration Forum, and the Platform of European Social NGOs, which bring together several European networks specializing in homelessness, child welfare, poverty, unemployment, etc. Finally, there is a clear tendency to formalize and establish these forums into a sort of European peak forum to order the rapidly growing field of advocacy work. All the existing federations, networks, and international organizations would be subsumed by one platform. Most organizations explicitly wish to keep these diverse contact groups or forums as open and semi-formal as they are. Sandrine Grenier's (Platform of European Social NGOs) observation is representative of several other respondents:

> And there is also a strong demand from the Commission's side; I think for them it is easier to have one interlocutor. From the platform's point of view, you come together on certain common issues, as I said. But this should not eliminate the particular features of each association. Each association is nevertheless eager to maintain its autonomy—each member, because each member covers several associations, right?

These forums (or contact groups, committees, or platforms—as they are variously called) thus respond to the needs of the European institutions, NGOs, and SMOs alike. Given the fact that peak associations, coalition advocacy networks, and SMOs operate independently at the European level, these forums provide a common organizational platform with a semi-institutionalized quality. That is, these forums are recognized as a collective form of information brokerage, action coordination, and policy deliberation without restricting the autonomy of the participating organizations. They are thus a means of stabilizing the many informal and ad-hoc working relationships among European activists. In this sense, they contribute to the development of an integrated interorganizational web in which different advocacy networks and organizations are equally represented, and in which different organizations share mutual memberships. On the one hand, there are "cumulative memberships," such as the European Network of the Unemployed (ENU) being a member of the EAPN, and then both organizations belonging to the overarching Platform of European Social NGOs. On the other hand, there are "cross memberships," such as the European Network of Women (ENOW) being part of EAPN but also a member of the European Women's Lobby (EWL), which in turn is a member of the European Platform of Social NGOs.

This increasingly dense web of informal contacts and formal memberships fulfills three different functions. First, it allows activists to be better informed about recent developments within the European institutions and to better coordinate their work. Second, these forums allow activists to become engaged in common lobbying. For example, the G-8 group regularly addresses the national ministers before the Council of Ministers presidency rotates to their country (interview with EEB member). Third, these forums serve as platforms for propelling a dialogue with the institutions of the EU. For instance, DG V meets with the Platform of European Social NGOs twice a year in order to engage into what is called a "civil dialogue." The latter is intended to complement, and to a certain degree become part of the institutionalized "social dialogue" between capital and labor (interview with Platform of European Social NGOs member). In the case of the Human Rights Contact Group we have a less established and formalized forum that fulfills the same task of promoting dialogue among activists and with the European institutions. Their regular meetings at the European Parliament in Strasbourg are attended by human rights groups, speakers of parliamentary committees, foreign ministers, human rights commissioners, and other staff. These meetings

are seen as good opportunities to listen to the concerns and claims of both sides, and useful for European institutions and SMOs alike (interview with Human Rights Watch activist).

In this way, forums stabilize and structure the social movement sector, which otherwise would remain fragmented and reduced to a series of momentary ad-hoc alliances. At the same time, they meet the needs of the institutions of the EU in that they assemble a number of activist groups into a structured dialogue. Consequently, these forums have become a means of the self-regulatory action favored by the European Commission (McLaughlin and Greenwood 1995). This puts the established advocacy groups and SMOs into a position where they can select "the rotten from the good apples" (Lotte Leicht, Human Rights Watch). Also, it limits the number of participants, which Barbara Helfferich of EWL says, brings about a "dynamism which ensures that we ourselves try to limit the number of associations that are arriving. There are twenty or twenty-five main associations, and there is no additional foundation." In this sense, these platforms and forums are not merely a transitory episode towards fully formalized peak associations and a complementary form of interest representation, but rather a stable means for integrating and regulating the social movement sector. They seem to be fully accommodated to the preferences of the European institutions for informal consultations and working routines.

ACTION REPERTOIRES: SMOs OR INTEREST GROUPS?

Scholars have identified a tendency towards "institutionalized participation" among European advocacy groups and SMOs (Rucht 2001: 199). This is particularly true for the various Euro-groups in their two organizational formats: peak associations and coalition advocacy networks. In particular, the peak associations were established with the strong support of the European institutions (here primarily the European Parliament and the Commission) in a top-down manner and with the explicit intention to build up a forum for and an interface to the various national organizations and grassroots constituencies. One example of a peak association is the EEB, which was founded in 1974 and consists of 130 organizations from twenty-four countries (mostly national associations or individual branches of international SMOs). Another example is the EWL, established in 1990 and sheltering today more than 2700 women's organizations in the fifteen member states of the EU, including national organizations and international coalitions or associations. The coalition advocacy networks also function at the European level but take a different organizational form, namely coordinating coalitions of other international organizations or networks. For instance, the EAPN (European Antipoverty Network), was created in 1990 to coordinate and promote the advocacy work of several international charities and European networks combating poverty and social exclusion, (e.g., of food banks, the unemployed, women etc.).

Both the peak associations and advocacy networks aim to represent a wider host of international or local organizations and thus a particular segment of the European public. Moreover, they are institutional partners of the respective parliamentary committees or DGs: first, because the European institutions grant them funds to support their work; second, because they are integrated into the (informal) consultative and decision-making practices;[7] and third, because they are mainly oriented in their day-to-day work towards providing European institutions with pertinent information and advice. According to one staff member of the EEB:

> Since we perform the lobbying work of EU institutions, it is quite clear that our working schedule must be harmonized with the Commission's working schedule. This means that we have to look at what the Commission has listed in its working schedule. Finally, we send a sort of shopping list to our members saying, "Look here, these are all the important themes. Think about them until the general assembly and see what we should treat as the main points.

While these Euro-groups were established and supported by the European institutions with "neocorporatist intentions," it did not prevent grassroots SMOs from opening their own European bureaus, as we mentioned before. In fact, several international organizations have opened EU offices in Brussels: Amnesty International (established in 1985) and Human Rights Watch (1994), Greenpeace International (1986), Friends of the Earth Europe (1986), and the World Wide Fund For Nature (1989), among others. In all these cases, we are not dealing with a free-standing organization but with an office of about five to ten staff members who are entirely accountable to their SMOs and constituencies, and thus restricted in their autonomy. These bureaus are established either because there is no European federation in place, and/or because the focus and strategies of their activism are different. In fact, many of these SMOs are generally known for their contentious activism, which distances them in principle from the peak federations or coalition advocacy networks.

Given these differences, and drawing upon social movement research, it makes sense that the Brussels activist community should be segregated into institutionalized advocacy Euro-groups and grassroots SMOs. According to the social movement literature, SMOs contribute "to the mobilization of a movements' constituency ... in an exclusively constituency- or client-oriented way" (Kriesi 1996: 153). Interest groups, for their part, specialize in interest representation without engaging into collective action. While advocacy or pressure groups might undoubtedly belong to an encompassing social movement, they are not to be considered SMOs as long as they do not regard constituency mobilization, movement networking, and consensus formation as essential parts of their activities (Diani 1992, Kriesi 1996, Klandermanns 1988). However, what makes the European case so striking is that the Brussels activist community does not conform to these conceptual distinctions. On the one hand, this is true when considering SMO action repertoires. Most SMOs commonly refrain from confrontational protest when addressing European institutions, and readily adapt to the established forms of "institutionalized participation" (Rucht 2001: 199). This is mirrored by the low number of protest events targeted directly at the European institutions (e.g., Imig and Tarrow 2001b, Rucht 2001). However, this is also apparent when considering the daily working routines of European activists—an observation clearly formulated by Marks and McAdam (1999: 110): "Overwhelmingly the forms of mobilization—even by nominally unconventional groups (e.g., Greenpeace)—have been narrowly institutional, reflecting the logic and structure of EU institutions." Indeed, if one listens to activists from European federations and SMOs, one can hardly distinguish between both of them, because they all describe their work explicitly in terms of lobbying, and because their daily job thus consists of typical lobbying duties in monitoring, informing, influencing, and membership services.

However, it would be certainly mistaken to deduce from these observations that European SMOs are institutionalizing and becoming conventional advocacy groups. These European bureaus are but one unit of their SMO, and the larger SMOs still have specific mandates to enable, instigate, and/or coordinate activism. Indeed, European-level bureau activists are valuable for the grassroots organization when it needs to define its European dimensions, issues, and goals, and/or when the implications of European policies need to be identified. The advocacy work of the European bureaus can therefore only be comprehensively assessed when taking the multilevel structure of the SMOs' activism and the related division of labor between Brussels activists and the local levels into account. According to Brigitte de la Graete of Amnesty International,

> We, on our part, work quite a lot with the Commission, as the Commission is located in Brussels. Therefore, we are doing direct lobbying. As far as the Ministries in general are concerned, the lobbying is done by the lobbyists from the different sections in cooperation with us, either in the form of a telephone briefing or by e-mail, or we send circular letters to all those

concerned, when important themes are on the agenda. And as for the Parliament, this is covered half by ourselves and half by the sections.

However, if this connectedness with the grassroots level is so important in identifying European bureaus as SMOs, then a further complication arises because peak associations also engage strongly into "multilevel action coordination" (Helfferich and Kolb 2001: 236-238), and have a division of labor between their Brussels office and member organizations located throughout Europe's capitals. In this context, both European peak associations and grassroots SMOs are clearly dependent on their national memberships and constituencies. This is the case because their member organizations, national branches, and/or local constituencies often have different opinions about the EU and the goals and tactics to be pursued in Brussels. Any action taken by activists in Brussels thus needs to be authorized by the organization's headquarters and/or constituencies. At the same time, intraorganizational consultations allow "brokerage"—the linking of unconnected national and local actors (Tarrow 2001: 392) and "transnational interest formation" (Helfferich and Kolb 2001: 233) to occur. Also, national branches and members have crucial importance for both SMO European offices and peak associations because of their concerted lobbying efforts directed toward national governments, and because of advocacy work of their European staffs. Due to the limited resources of the European offices, the European work (research, lobbying, coordination, etc.) is supported also by local constituents, sympathetic members, and the like. For instance, according to one respondent, the EEB

> ... has its own expert groups for all important issues, where we attempt to have at least one expert from each country, since the North-South divide in interests is rather strong; in this way, we aim to reach a balance and have all arguments taken into account.

Moreover, European SMOs do not engage in contentious action on the level of the European institutions themselves, but rather strive to enable, motivate, or coordinate protest actions at national and transnational levels. In this sense, the Euro-groups and grassroots SMOs have quite different orientations: in the latter case, the rationale of action is member-ship or constituency-oriented; in the former case more policy and influence oriented.[8] While grassroots SMOs are more geared towards mobilizing *their* constituencies, the Euro-groups are more oriented towards mobilizing information, opinions and expertise *from their* members.

In both cases, however, protest action is still linked essentially to the national and local level, as argued by Imig and Tarrow (2001b: 71). However, this does not prevent contentious mobilizations from erupting on the European level. In fact, local protest actions often develop a European dimension as soon as they become part of European-wide campaigns coordinated by international coalitions or networks (e.g., van der Klaauw 1994). At the same time, local protest waves transcend the national arena as they attempt to gain further momentum by using the opportunities provided by European NGO-alliances and institutions (e.g., Long 1998). While these cases are not yet the rule, there are prominent examples illustrating that this Europeanization of contentious action becomes one important strategic option; for example, the Euro-marches of the unemployed and precariously employed that were organized between 1997 and 2002. These grew out of French protests of 1994-1998 (Maurer and Pierru 2001), and had repercussions in Germany, Italy, and other European countries. From the national point of view, the European marches presented the possibility to externalize the conflict with the domestic government by generalizing issues and frames (e.g., the fight against neoliberalism and for a social Europe) and by building broader alliances and lengthening the mobilization cycle (Chabanet 2002). In fact, the Euro-marches were successfully staged using the consecutive EU summits—Amsterdam (1997), Cologne (1999), Lisbon and Nice (2000) or Goeteborg (2001), among others. Moreover, the Euro-

marches were part of the anti-globalization protests in Prague (2000) and Genova (2001).

This example illustrates the multilevel structure of European action repertoires. Anyone who overlooks it will easily misinterpret the true nature of contention at the European level. Moreover, the analyst of European contention should bear in mind that there are two interrelated aspects of this multilevel structure—structural and functional. First, in terms of structure, the European Union provides an arena of action that does not replace but rather complements the national and/or local levels. The European institutions provide therefore complex opportunity structures that expose activists to quite different action repertoires. On the one hand, supranational institutions like the European Commission stand for an institutionalized participation and/or "bureaucratic accommodation" of societal interests (Richardson and Jordan 1983), which we illustrated earlier by how the Commission encourages conventional forms of interest representation. On the other, intergovernmental institutions like the council of Ministers provides a better target for contentious mobilizations. In fact, we pointed at the occurrence of protest actions at EU summits. These are high profile political events that draw heavy media attention and fuse national, European, and international politics at one venue. It is understandable that public mobilizations take advantage of the structural opportunities that exist at these events.

To understand fully the EU's multilevel structure, we need also to consider its functionalist elements. In fact, the activities of European organizations need to be viewed as a contribution to a broader, multilevel activism. This relates to our earlier discussion where it was shown that these activities were not limited merely to interest representation and information brokerage, but extended from there into transnational interest formation and articulation (Helfferich and Kolb 2001: 233), by encouraging, enabling, and coordinating (domestic) protest.

CONCLUSIONS

We have argued that SMOs and advocacy groups were quite successful in positioning and accommodating themselves within the European polity. They were able to acquire considerable knowledge about the informal decision-making procedures and to professionalize their advocacy work accordingly (Rucht 1993, Imig and Tarrow 1999). In this way, European activists tended to favor conventional means of interest representation, which derived from the structure of EU governance and the related accommodative pressures it engendered (Rucht 2001; Marks and McAdam 1999; Imig and Tarrow 2001a). This is part of what Imig and Tarrow (2001a: 23) have called the EU's "domestication of conflict," meaning that "social movements continue to operate where they always have: in domestic politics and against national governments" (Imig and Tarrow 2001b: 71). This restricted the role of European activists, leaving them primarily with the task of information gathering and dissemination, interest representation, and—less often—coordinating European-wide collective action.

Both forces, the accommodative pressures of EU-governance and the domestication of conflicts, carry a real danger of insulating the European activist community and decoupling it from their grassroots constituencies, driving them into a "virtual representation" that leads them towards "representing the interests of their chosen constituent groups ... rather than attempting to mobilize them transnationally" (Tarrow 2001: 373). Indeed, it is not the relative absence of contentious action repertoires at the EU level that seems to be problematic, as long as the advocacy work in Brussels fulfills a specific function within a multilevel action repertoire. It is rather the insulation of the European advocacy community and its inclusion into the cocktail circuits of the Brussels polity that would seem to auger the ultimate end of European "movement politics."

This tendency undeniably exists, and while it is particularly evident among the European peak associations and pressure groups, it is also apparent among the European

activists of grassroots SMOs. However, our data indicate that this assessment must be qualified in terms of the functions and historical evolution of the EU governance. On the one hand, we showed that EU governance is still a multilevel process, thus forcing activists into the difficult and tedious work of "multilevel action coordination" (Helfferich and Kolb 2001). The European arena is not self-sufficient and autonomous but strongly interrelated with the national level, and this means also that European activists remain strongly dependent on their local constituencies. On the other hand, this multilevel coordination is an outcome of the gradual historical process of Europeanization of social movements. During this process, the number of European NGOs increased, gradually connecting otherwise unconnected domestic actors (Tarrow 2001: 392). Also, an increasingly dense network of informal interactions and/or mutual memberships was established. Here, self-regulation becomes the catchword, whereby activists engage in consensus formation and policy deliberation among themselves and with EU institutions. Although competitive relations and ad-hoc alliances will certainly continue to exist, these new structures of "transnational interest formation" (Helfferich and Kolb 2001: 233) and "consensus formation" (Klandermans 1988) create a new type of European advocacy that extends to and include local and national levels due to the multilevel structure of intra- and interorganizational interactions. Due to the multilevel structure of the EU, supranational forms of interest articulation and mobilization will not replace but rather complement local and national ones. That is, "different forms of representation ... will coexist and develop in intricate national, international and transnational venues" (Tarrow 2001: 396).

     In conclusion, we argue that the institutional structure and cooperative policy style of the European Union is rather conducive to the Europeanization of social movements in one important respect. It encourages the formation of European peak associations and advocacy coalitions, which engage into the gradual structuration of European activism. Against these factors, however, stands the highly self-regulatory impetus of the European institutions' consultative practices, which might produce an insulated community of Brussels activists engaged in "virtual representation" (Tarrow 2001: 373). This realistic scenario would undoubtedly dampen the broader movements' abilities to mediate between the established political institutions and civil society, thus undermining what social movements have been recurrently lauded for, i.e., voicing the grievances and claims of European citizens in a less structured and more unconventional and spontaneous way. While there is no guarantee that prevents this from happening, we propose a more comforting prospect whereby the "domestication of conflicts" (Imig and Tarrow 2001a: 23) and the related restriction of the European organizations' mandates and powers provide a practical antidote that will help to prevent the European movement community from losing ground.

ENDNOTES

[1] Here, there is little dissent amongst the scholars of European politics. "Big business interests dominate the pressure-group scene in Brussels. There are more of them, they are better resourced, and they have better contacts" (Grant 1995: 114. The same is said by Kohler-Koch (1994: 70). See also Greenwood (2003), Pfeifer (1995) and van Schendelen (2003).

[2] The European Parliament, for example, requires only that lobbyists and interest groups register themselves, and consultations take place informally thereafter. This is true not only for regular policy but also for exceptional occasions, such as the European Convent in 2003, which presented a new EU constitution after fifteen months of intense deliberation. Interest groups were not included in the ongoing consultations, except as observers (in the case of the unions, employers' associations and the regions, as participants of a plenary session with "civil society," or (at best) as "experts" of national delegations. Activists were rather frustrated with this constitutional process (Scott 2003), because there was little room for effectively bringing their concerns into the deliberations, other than through selective, informal lobbying.

[3] The "civil dialogue" is an initiative of the European Commission (here particularly DG V, social policy). It parallels the long established "social dialogue" between the Commission and the European level representatives of unions and employers' associations. Although it was aimed as a Treaty based mechanism for mandatory consultation on social policy matters, so far the "civil dialogue" consists only of regular, semi-institutionalized, and non-mandatory consul-

tations with representatives of "civil society," here particularly with voluntary associations or social NGOs.

[4] The database "Coneccs" assembles information on a very broad range of nongovernmental organizations. Registration is optional; 685 NGOs have provided information. From the various policy areas I considered only organizations registered in the policy areas "environmental" on the one hand, "human rights" and "social affairs" on the other. The database is accessible online: http://europa.eu.int/comm/civil_society/coneccs/index_en.htm

[5] In fact, the Commission's European Environmental Directorate-General (DG XI was established in 1981, and environmental concerns were introduced 1986 via the SEA in order to provide European institutions with proper regulatory competencies.

[6] The remaining nine NGOs operate as committees or councils and cannot be grouped easily into one common category.

[7] This institutional role is described by Barbara Helfferich of the EWL: "In the meantime, we have become so popular—in quotation marks—that we provide some information to the European Commission and the European Parliament. So, if there is anything on the theme of women, people call us. And this is a little bit too much for us since, basically, we are the only central group who is able to carry out this task."

[8] Here we perceive the difference between the European offices of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Brigitte Ernst de la Graete argues that its office is "a liaison office and a bureau of expertise servicing the movement's other structures." In the case of Human Rights Watch the orientation towards effectively influencing policy is more important. "Most often what we do is that we try everything to convince policy makers, and if they don't, we target the press and leak it. But these are very difficult decisions .... And also, you sometimes have to make more long-term decisions on whether this would cost some channels in the future" (Lotte Leicht, Human Rights Watch.).

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