

The Battle for Influence: The Politics of Business Lobbying in the European Parliament

The European Parliament (EP) has become an increasingly important lobbying venue for business due to the recent enhancement of its regulatory powers. Existing research, however, disagrees on the extent to which the intensified business lobbying has resulted in increased business influence on EP policy outcomes. Some studies find a 'business bias' in the EP, while others still perceive it to be a forceful promoter of diffuse interests (such as consumer and environmental groups).

In a newly published [article](#), Dr Maja Kluger Rasmussen examines the conditions under which business groups shape policy outcomes in the EP. The article uses a comparative qualitative case study design of four recent legislative dossiers, and draws on process-tracing of EU documents and lobbying letters, and 145 interviews.

Maja shows that business influence is a conditional concept that needs to be studied in its institutional and issue-specific context. Although business holds a privileged position in politics owing to superior resources, expertise and structural power, it far from dominates policy outcomes in the EP. This is because business is faced with countervailing forces which caps its influence – most notably, noisy politics, unsympathetic committees and rifts within the business sector itself. Business often finds itself battling not labour unions or NGOs, but itself. While the corporate world may, in some abstract sense, be regarded as representing a capitalist class interest, this notion is a platitude of little analytical and empirical value.

Dissent within the business sector serves as a brake on business influence – a brake that is most likely to be stepped on when faced with legislation harmonizing process standards. Process standard legislation is typically examined by periphery committees, attracts intense Member State lobbying and often creates fissures within the business community due to the diverse regulatory regimes across the EU, which works to the advantage of diffuse interests. Contrast this with proposals harmonizing product standards, which are normally examined by mainstream committees, usually, but not always, characterized by limited Member State lobbying and a more homogenous business sector.

Business groups tend to prevail at the expense of diffuse interests when European business federations are internally united, they lobby on highly technical issues (with limited member state lobbying) and mainstream committees examine proposals. When these stars are aligned, policy outcomes tend to favour the views of business. Although opposition from labour unions and NGOs may offset some of the influence exerted by business, these groups do not come close to the political armaments of business so long as dossiers are dealt with by mainstream committees and evince little interest from Member States.

The [full article](#) can be downloaded from the [Journal of Common Market Studies](#) website.

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