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Balanced or Biased? Interest Groups and Legislative Lobbying in the European News Media

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Abstract. This article examines the coverage of legislative lobbying in European news media. The starting point thereby is that lobbying in the crowded EU-level interest community is not only a struggle for direct access to policymakers, but that in order to realize policy goals many interest groups rely on political attention generated by the media. Our main research question is how media attention is skewed towards particular interests and which factors explain these varying levels of prominence. Our empirical analysis is based on a set of 125 legislative proposals adopted by the European Commission between 2008 and 2010. For all these cases we identified 379 interest organizations that made public statements, we coded the amount of media attention these organized interest gained, the type of statements they made as well as some key organizational features. While the aggregate levels of attention look pretty balanced, our evidence shows that media prominence is skewed towards particular types of interests, more in particular that organized interests which oppose a proposed policy gain significantly higher levels of media attention.

Introduction

Being noticed by those in power is crucial for organized interests. The news media provide one relevant platform to draw policymakers' attention and to put pressure on them (Kollman, 1998; Mahoney, 2007; Beyers 2004). Moreover, through the media, interest organizations can signal their grievances towards their constituencies and increase the public scrutiny of policymaking processes. Media coverage can thus be considered as a crucial asset for interest organizations to aspire. However, media attention is scarce and not always equally distributed. Some interests gain more coverage than others, which might give them some competitive advantage.

Little is known about which organized interests are successful in gaining media prominence and why. The interest group literature has not paid much attention to the role of media coverage in legislative lobbying processes. Many scholars conceive the pursuit of media prominence as part of an organization's 'outside' strategy, but news media coverage of legislative lobbying itself is rarely studied. The limited literature in this field explains a group's media prominence by organizational resources (Thrall, 2006), the news value of different group types (Binderkrantz, 2012), issue characteristics (Danielian & Page, 1994), or niche related strategies (Bernhagen & Trani, 2012). One of the weak spots in existing media studies on lobbying is that no one examined how conflict impacts coverage and whether different sides of a conflict dimension are covered equally. The predominant focus on diversity in group type could be somewhat misleading as groups of the same type (for instance specific business organizations versus environmental interests) do not necessarily adopt similar policy positions or lobby for the same cause. Therefore, our analysis accounts for the cause on which an organized interest lobbied, more specifically by looking at the policy *positions* adopted on specific pieces of legislation. Our focus on these policy positions allows us to capture which positions are more inclined to gain media prominence when lobbying on legislative issues.

In contrast to former studies that were mostly nationally focused, we concentrate on the European Union (EU). Research on lobbying in the EU is flourishing, yet a systematic study of interest group activity in the European news media remains absent. Moreover, as the EU lacks a genuine public sphere (Meyer, 1999; Schlesinger, 1999), a situation reinforced by its trans-national nature and its complex policymaking procedures, media coverage is often presumed to be less relevant. Nonetheless, by arguing that there is little at the EU-level that resembles domestic communicative spaces, one might neglect or underestimate how media coverage plays a role in EU legislative policymaking. Empirical studies demonstrate that,

even with regard to EU policymaking, a considerable number of organized interests make use of media related strategies (Chalmers, 2013; Beyers 2004). Moreover, for instance Koopmans and Erbe (2004) submit that the media are important channels in the communication process between the European institutions, organized interests and the general public. Given the crowded nature of the Brussels' lobby circuit, gaining coverage through media appearances in EU-level outlets helps to attract the attention of policymakers and signals the salience of policy positions adopted by organized interests. This is one of the reasons why during the past twenty years various specialized media outlets emerged at the EU-level (for instance European Voice, EurActiv, and EUobserver).

Given the growing relevance of media prominence in EU lobbying processes, a closer investigation of media coverage on EU legislation is needed to understand who's voices are heard and why. Although media attention might be relevant for many organized interests, only a small set of them will gain substantial prominence. Moreover, some organized interests do not seek media attention, or may even eschew it, and react only if necessary, for instance when an opponent gains substantial public attention. Our empirical goal is to assess which factors explain why some interests gain more media prominence than others. The article is organized as follows. In the next section we conceptualize the role of media attention more closely by integrating our understanding of interest group politics with the broader literature on media attention and party politics. The subsequent section develops research hypotheses focusing on organizational resources, the type of constituency represented and the nature of the policy positions advocated by an organized interests. Then, we describe the research design behind the dataset we developed for this project. The fourth section presents the results from a multivariate analysis based on evidence on the policy positions adopted by 379 organized interests regarding 125 pieces of EU legislation. The conclusion summarizes our findings and reflects on some avenues for future research. Our main conclusion is that an interest group position on concrete pieces of legislation is an important driver of media prominence, i.e. groups who oppose a legislative proposal are more likely to grow prominent in the news.

Why policy positions matter for the media coverage of interest groups

Media attention is crucial for contemporary political organizations. For instance, in the field of party politics media prominence is traditionally conceived of as something political parties aspire and as an important explanatory factor of campaigning success (Van Aelst et al., 2008; Walgrave & De Swert, 2004; De Bruycker & Walgrave, 2014). True, the role of media

and organized interests in EU legislative politics differs from domestic electoral processes, but some aspects are similar. As political parties, interest groups deliberately seek media prominence in order to give clout to their position, to seek and inform supporters and to signal their policy views to policymakers. Moreover, also the expertise of interest groups has some relevance for journalists. For instance, groups that enjoy an insider status may supply confidential information on policy processes. Given these similarities between political parties and interest groups, we are able to build a generic framework that integrates insights from the party politics and the interest group literature.

Our main objective is to analyze which interests grow prominent in the news. Or, why journalists and news producers spend more attention – in terms of coverage – to some interests compared to other interests? Media prominence and media bias are strongly related concepts. If some actor becomes prominent, this could imply that other actors are less prominent. If some interests has a higher chance to gain systematic media prominence because of some specific features, we could argue that the media space is skewed or biased in favor of a specific type of interest (see also D'Alessio & Allen, 2000; Andrews & Caren, 2010; Baron, 2006; Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Lin et al., 2011). One repeatedly heard conclusion in the literature is that interest representation tends to be biased towards a few selective interests and that interest group communities are skewed towards interest organizations with certain organizational characteristics, for instance towards resourceful and well-endowed constituencies (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Lowery & Gray, 2004). Yet, one needs to be careful with qualifying an entire interest group system as being *biased* as bias may refer to different things ranging from influencing policy outcomes, becoming recognized as a representative organization or the potency to get mobilized. The major problem is that simple counts of organized interests tell us little about the extent to which a particular interest is well - or not well - represented, especially because we lack a normative yardstick which allows us to claim beforehand how a balanced system would look like (Grossmann, 2012; Lowery & Gray, 2004).

However, numbers and distributions tell us something about how interest group communities function. Bias could be defined as a situation where two or more entities, different organization types or organizations with conflicting policy positions, gain a significant different amount of attention. In terms of media coverage it refers to a situation where two or more entities, different types of organizations or different sides of a conflict dimension, are not evenly covered. For instance, it could mean female politicians gain less media attention as their male counterparts or that government gains more coverage than

opposition parties (Hopmann et al., 2011; Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2009; Stovall, 1985; Van Aelst et al., 2008; Van Dalen, 2012). Similarly, we can qualify an instance where only proponents of upcoming legislation on GMO-technology gain attention as less balanced, more biased or skewed, than a case where both opponents and proponents gain equal attention.

Generally, media studies on interest groups focus on organizational diversity, i.e. whether some organization types – for instance business compared to civil society groups, or resourceful versus less resourceful organizations – gain more or less attention compared to other types. For example, scholars analyzed whether the distribution of interest groups in the media corresponds with the number of citizens sharing the views represented by these interest groups (Schlozman & Tierney, 1986) or whether the media presence of interest groups parallels with distributions in the overall population of organizations in an interest group system (Bernhagen & Trani, 2012; Binderkrantz, 2012).

This focus on organizational characteristics brought valuable insights in explaining varying levels of media prominence, but it also limits our understanding of who wins media space and why. On the one hand, business is usually expected to gain more media attention compared to NGOs, as it is presumed to possess more organizational resources (Danielian & Page, 1994; Thrall, 2006). On the other hand NGOs are more likely to seek media attention as it is supposed that they are less able to get their voices heard via traditional forms of inside lobbying (Kollman, 1998). Therefore, NGOs are expected to rely more on the newsworthiness of protest activities and media campaigns to gain attention (Andrews & Caren, 2010; Thrall, 2006). In particular the news value of conflict and the drama that surrounds conflict creates a platform for less powerful actors (van Dalen, 2011). For instance, Danielian and Page (1994) argue that this logic is applicable to interest groups in the US where citizen action groups or NGOs gained the second most coverage in TV news reports, succeeding business groups. However, departing from group type as predictor of media prominence, one could expect that both business interests and NGOs – or, the resourceful and the resource poor – grow prominent in the news. The former because of their organizational resources and the latter because they are more motivated to seek media attention. This inconclusiveness signifies the need to separate group type conceptually from resources, the conflicts that surround specific policies and how these conflicts influence the strategies and activities of interest groups.

Some scholars studied the effect of resources on prominence in the news, independent from group type. For instance, Thrall (2006) posits that capabilities – such as money, members and staff – are the main drivers of prominence in the news. Andrews and Caren (2010) confirm that resources, after controlling for group type, yield positive results in

predicting media attention. By analyzing the effect of resources and controlling for group type, these scholars separate group type from resources and do not start from the presumption that business interests are always and by definition more resourceful than NGOs. The same can be done for the conflictual nature of groups activities and statements. Instead of assuming that the activities of NGOs are more extreme and newsworthy than business interests, one can look at characteristics of the actual statements they make and the positions they adopt.

Still, by focusing predominantly on organizational characteristics the policy struggles among interest groups tends to be reduced to a struggle where business interest stand against civil society groups or where the poor struggle against the well-endowed interests. One of the weaknesses of existing media studies on lobbying is that nobody examined whether conflict occurs and, if so, whether different sides of a conflict dimension are covered equally. This limits our insight in the extent to which political conflict and the politicized nature of particular legislative cases are covered. The focus on diversity in group type could be somewhat misleading as groups within the same organizational category do not necessarily adopt similar policy positions or lobby for the same cause (Daviter, 2007; Smith, 2000). For instance, on regulatory policies regarding renewable energy wind mill producers might ally with environmental NGOs in opposition against a policy view supported by the coal industry. Therefore, we take into account for which cause an organized interest lobbied by looking in detail at the policy position organized interest adopted. In this respect, Baumgartner and colleagues (2009) speak of 'sides', which they define as sets of actors who seek the same policy outcome. By focusing on the policy positions actors adopt in concrete legislative processes, we analyze which sort of policy positions are more inclined to gain media prominence when lobbying on EU legislative issues.

Hypotheses on who wins media space and why

In developing hypotheses on why some organized interests gain media prominence, one needs to take account of the *dynamics* leading to media attention. Media attention, defined as the amount and prominence of coverage that an interest receives, is both the result of interest groups seeking access to the media as of journalists deciding who to include in their news stories (Andrews & Caren, 2010, p. 843; Binderkrantz, 2012, p.3). First, seeking media attention can be part of an organizations 'outside lobbying' strategy. Groups purposefully seek out the public debate to signal to policymakers the level of public support they enjoy or expand the support for their views among the broader public and in this way put pressure on policymakers (Kollman, 1998). Second, media prominence may result from

selective processes whereby reporters select items from a universe of events. This selection by journalists, news agencies or editors is driven by their preferences, their political beliefs as well as journalistic routines, a phenomenon also known as ‘slant’ or ‘selection bias’ (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000, p. 145; Druckman, 2005). In sum, growing prominent in the news is a matter of seeking *and* gaining attention, and both aspects are important when looking at organizational characteristics and interest group positions as drivers of prominence. Drawing on both push and pull dynamics of media attention, this section develops hypotheses on how *resources*, *organization type* and the *policy position* groups adopt with regard to specific legislative cases affect media prominence.

A first organizational characteristic that may affect media prominence are the *resources* an interest group has at its disposal (Andrews & Caren, 2010, p.846). Media attention can bring important benefits and advantages for interest groups, but making the news depends highly on resources. We understand resources as the financial and human means – such as its staff and budget - an organization has at its disposal to fulfill its core mission, to maintain itself and to seek policy influence. Producing news is a labor intensive process demanding time and commitment from trained professionals. Employing spin-doctors or media experts is a luxury not all organized interests can afford. Employees of resource scarce organizations are often obliged to combine media campaigning work with a variety of other tasks such as raising funds, communicating to members and advocating policymakers directly. Due to an often higher workload and greater diversity of responsibilities they have less time to invest in media related strategies. Previous research on interest groups already demonstrated the relationship between organizational resources and media prominence. For instance, Thrall (2006) shows that only large and well-funded interest groups have the ability to consistently play a role in public debates (see also Danielian & Page, 1994). Resources not only boost the capacity to produce news, but resourceful organizations are also an attractive source for journalists (Andrews & Caren, 2010; Barker-Plummer, 2002; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). More resources means more capacity to collect relevant information, which turns resourceful organizations in interesting information providers for journalist and increases their newsworthiness towards media outlets. In short, because resources entail a considerable capacity to seek media attention and newsworthiness, we expect that resourceful organizations, especially in terms of staff members, have a higher potential to become prominent in media debates on EU legislative cases. Thus, our first hypothesis is;

H1: The more resourceful an organization, the more prominent its appearance in media debates surrounding specific legislative processes.

Not only capabilities, but also *organization type*, more precisely the constituency groups represent can trigger the motivation to produce media content and explains media prominence. First, group strategies in terms of seeking media attention may vary depending on the type of constituency represented. For some organizations media attention may bring additional and non-policy related benefits, such as additional resources or an expansion of the membership corpus. The reliance on media strategies strongly relates to the organizational goals. Some groups supply their specific membership with certain goods and benefits; others have idealistic goals and seek a supportive constituency from different parts of society. Members of the latter groups do not receive direct benefits, but these groups need to continually reinforce the loyalty of their constituency. Media strategies are an important tool for this (Maloney et al., 1994; Walker, 1991). For instance, a recent study of Binderkrantz (2005) examining the strategies of 1722 Danish interest groups, shows that interest group that depend on a large and diffuse constituency rely more on indirect strategies, such as contacting journalists, seeking media attention or staging protest activities. Moreover, as these groups are more inclined to use protest, demonstrations and other activities that appeal to the newsworthiness of conflict, drama and the unexpected, it is often hypothesized that the activities of groups representing a diffuse constituency are more newsworthy compared to those of specific interests (Andrews & Caren, 2010; Danielian & Page, 1994, p. 1060). Based on the observation that groups that depend on large and diffuse constituencies need to seek more public attention to retain and expand their support basis and the news worthiness of their activities we expect groups with a diffuse constituency to be more prominent in the news:

H2: Interest organizations representing a diffuse constituency, will enjoy a higher prominence in the news compared to specific interests.

As outlined above, an important feature of existing media studies on interest groups is that they predominantly look at organizational features, which in our view draws an inaccurate view of who gains media prominence. Our main hypothesis is that a better understanding of media prominence will benefit from looking at the cause for which a group lobbies.

First, organized interests are not all equally keen to gain media attention and for some too much public visibility may backfire. Especially for those who support the existing policy status quo, media visibility might work counterproductive. Increased attention may lead to conflict expansion and mobilize potential opponents. Organized interests supporting

entrenched powers may therefore even avoid or prevent media coverage for a given issue and sometimes it is argued that especially the powerful avoid media coverage and act out of the spotlights (Baumgartner et al., 2009). Seeking media prominence is then a strategy for change seekers rather than for those supporting a specific policy.

In EU legislative policymaking the European Commission (EC) has the monopoly to initiate and propose new legislation. Applying the former rationale, an interest organization may aim avoiding too much attention when being supportive towards a proposal tabled by the EC as this may arouse potential opponents to lobby actively against it. However, those who seek to change the EC legislative proposal, for instance amending or blocking the EC's legislative initiatives, might be tempted to extend the scope of conflict (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Schattschneider, 1960) and by appealing to a broader audience, the Members of the European Parliament (EP) or national government representatives in the Council, these interests may try to seek strategic advantages. In order to understand media visibility of organized interest, it is therefore key to consider how lobbyists position themselves in a particular legislative debate.

Second, gaining media space is not only a matter of abilities or motivations; it is also a matter of which organized interests attract attention from media gatekeepers. Some news values and journalistic routines favor specific causes more than others. To attract media attention, statements made by organized interests must exhibit some news value and one important media rule is the propensity of media to prioritize bad news. Negative events and statements are more unambiguous and contain some surprising aspects which make them more suitable for journalists to incorporate in their stories (Andrews & Caren, 2010, p. 846; Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Soroka, 2006;). Due to the higher value of negative news and drama, it is expected that those who openly criticize a given legislative proposal will gain more attention and prominence in news coverage. Supportive statements on how good things are, are less newsworthy than critical and juicy attacks on the policy initiatives taken by policymakers. It is therefore reasonable to expect that coverage will be skewed to interests challenging an EC legislative proposal, not only because such interests are more inclined to seek media attention – as outlined before – but also because they are more inclined to gain it.

H3: Interest organizations who oppose legislation proposed by the EC enjoy a higher media prominence compared to groups that favor a legislative proposal.

Summarized, by focusing on the *cause* for which interest groups lobby, the study of

media prominence accorded interest groups goes beyond an organizational focus. It gives, in our view, a more accurate view of who wins and who loses in the media sphere, in terms of which side in a conflict gains media prominence. In the remainder of this article we test our hypotheses with a content analysis of media coverage on 125 legislative proposals adopted by the EC between 2008 and 2010.

Data and research design

The data we use are novel and part of a larger project on EU legislative lobbying.¹ The goal of this project is to analyze lobbying strategies and interest group influence for a stratified sample of 125 European legislative proposals (directives and regulations) that were submitted between 2008 and 2010 (Beyers et al., 2014a). The sample procedure is equivalent to the procedure Thomson used in his research on EU legislative politics (2011). For the sampling all EC proposals for regulations and directives between 2008 and 2010 were mapped. Afterwards all media coverage in five media outlets (European Voice, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Agence Europe, Le Monde and Financial Times) related to these proposals was identified with electronic keyword searches and archived. A set of 48 directives and 38 regulations that gained media coverage in more than two media outlets were selected. In addition we included 20 proposals where the EC organized online consultations with organized interests. By doing this we prioritized legislative proposals that were publicly debated and/or where interest organizations mobilized. To control for this, we added randomly 19 proposals that gained little or no media coverage and where no EC consultation took place. Our sample of 125 proposals is thus stratified in the sense that we overweight cases that gain media attention or where public consultations were held by the EC.

Via an online search in the electronic archives of five media outlets (European Voice, EurActiv, Agence Europe, Le Monde and Financial Times) we mapped the complete media coverage related to these 125 legislative cases. Important is that only coverage that could be directly connected to the EC proposal was kept; coverage that was only vaguely related to the subject matter of the proposal was not archived. We adopted this rather strict rule as we wanted to concentrate on coverage related to legislative issues, and not necessarily the coverage on some more general theme indirectly or vaguely related to the legislative case.²

In a next step we identified all stakeholders (public and private) and stored all the statements these actors made in a separate database (see online appendix for more details about the database structures and format). These statements are quotes made by interest group officials that can be directly linked to one of the sampled proposals. We coded all these

entries according to a technique that is highly similar to the political claim analysis developed by Koopmans and Statham (1999), whereby the unit of observation consists of an actor who puts forward a particular statement or claim (see also Baumgartner et al., 2008; Miller & Riechert, 2000). To assess media prominence, our dependent variable, we look at the number of words the groups were able to devote to the issue in the news. Other possible indicators of prominence are based on the physical placement of the article in the news, but as we also use online news sources, this is not feasible in our study. Nonetheless, numerous former studies focused on word count as a base to measure media prominence (Cheng et al., 2011; Hayes et al., 2007; Hartley & Coleman, 2008; Lee, 2007; Stroud & Kenski, 2007). Based on the statements we also identified the policy positions, one of our key independent variables, in terms of whether actors 1) aimed to block or shape most of the legislative proposal, 2) aimed to shape specific parts of it, 3) were supporting it or 4) no clear policy position could be adopted.

In addition to the substantive coding of the statements actors made, 379 organized interests that made these statements were coded on the basis of information available on the organizational website.³ For the purpose of this article, organized interests were categorized into those who have a diffuse and those who have a specific constituency. The groups with a so-called diffuse constituency include: labor unions, environmental groups, groups working on humanitarian questions, and other civil society groups such as consumer and religious interests. The specific interests were categorized depending on the types of members they have: 1) sectoral businesses associations, 2) cross-sectoral business associations, 3) professional organizations, and 4) a category with individual firms. Next to diffuse and specific interests we also included regions and local authorities and research organizations in the analysis. Additionally, we coded, based on the website of these groups, the number of staff members employed. Finally, we coded whether these organizations have primarily a domestic, EU-wide or international constituency. For firms and research organizations we looked at their level of activity on the international, European or domestic market.⁴

The entries in the dataset we analyze below represent 559 dyads of each time one organization making one or more statements on one of the 125 sampled legislative proposals. For each dyad we measured the organization's policy position vis-à-vis the legislative proposal in question and the number of words it was able to devote to it in the news coverage. In the next section, we first explore the evidence in terms of how many groups mobilized and on how many of the sampled proposals. Afterwards we look at media balance from an aggregate perspective and compare this with some known population distributions. Finally,

we carry out a multivariate regression analysis with media prominence as the dependent variable.

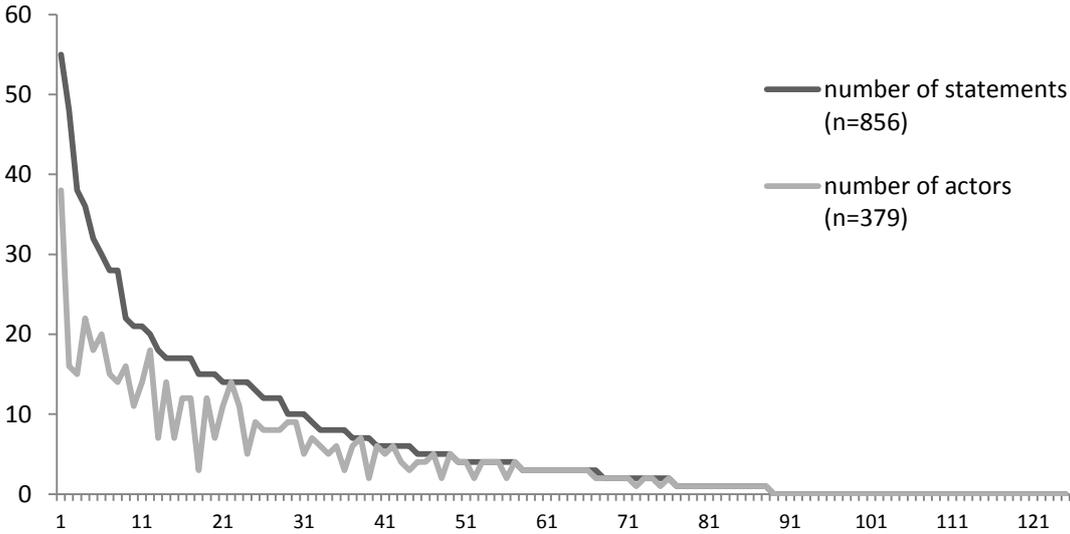
Results

The production of news stories does not take place in a vacuum. As argued above, factors related to the context of concrete legislative cases, more precisely the policy position adopted by organized interests, are crucial in understanding the media attention a particular interest gains. For one, we know that public visibility of interest organizations varies strongly from issue to issue (Danielian & Page, 1994). Also research on EU lobbying shows that lobbying behavior, including the use of media strategies, depends on issue characteristics (Klüver, 2011; Mahoney, 2007; Beyers & Kerremans, 2012). But why and how do issue characteristics matter? More than political parties, organized interests tend to focus their influence efforts on a few issues or legislative cases. Many EU legislative politics concerns particularistic issues as they affect one of just a few interests or relate to matters confined to one specific sector. While a relatively small number of cross-sector organizations are simultaneously active in multiple fields, many organized interests gravitate to a small number of issues. Therefore, in a small number of cases, lobbying will be highly visible, crowding takes place and various conflicting interests get mobilized (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; LaPira et al., 2014; Smith, 2000;). Within these more crowded fields the fight for gaining policy attention and influence is highly competitive. These are the legislative cases that gain public attention, are salient, partisan and ideological (Burstein & Linton, 2002). Mobilization in such cases is more than just the numbers of active lobbyists. In these cases a large array of actors gets involved and conflicts generally concern broader issues such as the appropriate level of regulation within a specific field or the redistributive implications involved. Not only mobilization patterns, but also the newsworthiness varies across legislative cases. Some issues draw more media attention than others, because they have a higher news value or are more salient to the broader public. This creates more leverage for interest groups and political parties working on these issues and, subsequently, to gain media prominence (Walgrave & De Swert, 2004).

Therefore, before testing our hypotheses, we explore media attention and mobilization patterns with regard to the selected legislative proposals. For the 125 legislative proposals we archived 1,298 relevant articles in which 1,239 statements were made by interest organizations. Of these statements, 281 were not directly related to the sampled legislative proposals and therefore omitted for further analysis. Other statements (n=62) were relevant,

but made by organizations that could not be identified because of vague or wrong descriptions in the media and therefore dropped from the analyses. Opinion pieces and interviews (n=40) were also left out for further analysis due to their different nature compared to shorter media statements.

Figure 1. Number of actors and statements (Y-axis) identified per proposal (X-axis; n=125 legislative cases)



The remaining 856 statements came from 379 unique interest organizations (i.e. interest groups, firms, various NGOs, research institutes and regional or local governments), with a mean of 4.49 interest organizations per legislative proposal ($s=5.92$). The average number of statements per proposal is 6.83 ($s=9.99$); for 37 of the sampled proposal not any statement was made by an interest organization in the selected media outlets.⁵ Figure 1 illustrates the strong concentration and skewed distribution of statements ($g=1.87$) and actors ($g=2.34$) on a rather small set of legislative proposals. More precisely, in 65 percent (or $n=81$) of the 125 legislative proposals, only five or less statements were made (proposals on the left side of Figure 1), while for only 2 percent more than 30 statements were identified (proposals concentrated on the right of Figure 1). The skewness is even somewhat stronger for actor involvement. Here, we observe that 72 percent of the proposals attracts five or less actors making a statement, while in only three cases (2 percent) we could identify more than 20 organized interests. Another way to illustrate this pattern is by looking at how organized interests specialize. Out of the 379 identified organizations 307 (or 81 percent) made statements about only one proposal; 16 percent made statements about two to five proposals; and only 3 percent made statements about more than five proposals. This shows that most

organizations mobilize on one case only, while a small set of organizations is active across multiple cases. These results are highly consistent with what we know from theories on niche behavior and bandwagoning in lobbying processes, namely, that many groups gravitate to specific issues and aim to monopolize particular policy niches while only a few are active across multiple policy issues and fields (Baumgartner & Leech, 2001; Gray & Lowery, 1996).

Considering the aggregate media coverage – across all sampled proposals – the number of interest organizations making statements in the news seems quite balanced when comparing different group types. In the first column of Table 1 we see that civil society interests or NGOs are, compared to business interests, weakly represented in the media sources we mapped. However, this does not automatically mean that media coverage is unbalanced or biased in favor of business interests. It could be that some organization types are less visible simply because they are well represented in the overall interest group population. To control for this, we compare our data with the EU interest group population as mapped by Wonka et al. (2010), which is currently one of the most comprehensive overviews of the population of interest groups lobbying at the European level. Because the Wonka et al. dataset does not distinguish civil society organizations from business associations we estimated the distribution based on a re-coded sample of this dataset (see online appendix for details). When comparing EU media and EU-level population data, media attention for different types of groups appears to be quite balanced. The distribution of interest group types in the media and in the population is very similar.⁶

Table 1. Types of organized interests in the media compared some population data

	EU media AUTHOR	EU population Wonka et al. 2009 ^a	Actors aiming to block and/or change major parts of the legislative proposal	Share of the total word count	Number of words in statements made by Average (standard deviation)
	Percentages	Percentages	Percentages	Percentages	
Business associations and firms	67%	67%	63%	69%	136 (143)
Civil society organizations	21%	17%	26%	22%	142 (134)
Regional and local authorities	5%	10%	6%	3%	87 (65)
Research organizations and think thanks	8%	5%	4%	6%	108 (110)
n	379	3058	159	53,130	

^a Estimated distribution based on recodings of a sample from the n=3,058 Wonka et al. data-set (2010), see online appendix for more details.

Additionally, we also mapped the policy positions visible in the media coverage. In Table 1 we see that the distribution of actors aiming ‘to block’ or ‘to change most of a legislative proposal’ is also very similar to population distributions, which points at a rather weak relationship between organization type and policy position. Or, the distribution of actors who oppose a specific policy proposal corresponds pretty well with the other distributions. Finally, the total amount of coverage different interest group types get (as a percentage of the total number of words in 856 statements) reflects very well the overall distribution in the population data. Nonetheless, when we consider the average number of words an individual organization was able to devote to a specific proposal (last column), we observe that the numbers are highly similar when we compare these for business and civil society organizations. Despite the fact that there are more mobilized business than civil society organizations, one cannot conclude that, on average and on the basis of our data, the media space is biased or skewed in terms of organization type. All this suggests that actor type is not a strong predictor for media prominence in the news, at least when comparing business and civil society organizations.

Our first key explanatory variable are organizational resources, measured by the amount of staff (natural logged) an organized interest employs. Despite the fact that this variable was difficult to code, for instance because websites are not always accurate, we managed (by combining website searches with expert interviews) to measure staff size for 303 organization (or 80 percent), which means that we have resource data for 474 (or 85 percent) of the dyads. For our second independent variable we use the group type categorization introduced above, whereby civil society organizations/NGOs are the reference category. For the third explanatory variable, position, we use the category ‘organizations seeks to change most or block proposal’ as reference category. In some instances we had multiple statements for one proposals and in most of these cases we coded one position on the basis of the overall set of statements, based on the most pronounced position an organization voiced. When different statements expressed clearly conflicting positions, we coded the position as being ‘unclear’. Generally, statements that criticize the sampled proposals gain more media prominence than statements supporting EC legislative proposals. Namely, in 28 percent of the 856 relevant statements groups aim to block or change most of the proposal, in 23 percent groups aim to shape small parts of the proposal and in 19 percent of the statements groups are supporting the proposal. For 30 percent of the statements the position of the group vis-à-vis the proposal was unclear or could not be coded from our sources. This distribution,

however, does not tell us much about variation in terms of media prominence as the length of the statements is not taken into account.

Therefore, for our multivariate analyses we operationalize media prominence with the word count of the entire set of statements made by one organized interest with respect to the sampled legislative proposals (n=559 group-proposal dyads). As this dependent variable is a positively skewed count variable and is characterized by some over-dispersion ($\bar{x}=133.75$; $s=136.52$) we use a negative binomial regression model. Because the dependent variable cannot have zero values – statements consist of at least one word – the negative binomial is estimated with a zero truncated model. As our 559 dyadic observations are nested in 125 legislative cases, we have repeated measures and cannot assume that the residuals are independent, follow a normal distribution and standard errors might lead to too optimistic interpretation of regression coefficients. Therefore we estimate clustered standard errors (with the legislative proposal as cluster-variable) instead of empirical standard errors.

We added two relevant control variables to our models. First, we control whether the level at which an organization has its primary locus – namely three levels of mobilization; national, European (reference category) and international – affect coverage in EU-level or national level papers. It is plausible to expect that national groups are more prominent in national than in EU-level outlets. Second, bias could be related to the media-outlet. For instance, EU-level media sources might spend more attention on EU-affairs, for instance by interviewing more EU-level lobbyists, compared to national level outlets such as Financial Times or Le Monde. Therefore, we established a measure gauging the percentage of the statements an interest organization voiced in EU oriented media.

Finally, as an additional robustness control, we added two interaction effects. First, we interact the level of mobilization of the organization with the extent to which the statements were made in EU-level or national level media. In this way we check whether groups that are domestically based have more national prominence while EU-level interest groups would enjoy more prominence in EU-level media. Second, staff size has a different nature and meaning for firms, research organizations and regional/local governments compared to business associations, NGOs and civil society groups. While for the former lobbying is a spin-off of their core activities, this is the core business for the latter. We control for this by adding one interaction effect for the staff-size and three dummies distinguishing each of the former organization types and all the latter organization types. We did not differentiate for the latter as their core business – political representation – can be considered as being comparable and equivalent.

Table 2. Estimating media prominence (zero-truncated negative binomial regression; significance levels are based on clustered standard errors; null model: df=2, LL=-3274, AIC=6552, BIC=6560)

	Model I			Model II			Model III			Model IV		
	Estimate	SE	p	Estimate	SE	p	Estimate	SE	p	Estimate	SE	p
Intercept	5.33	(0.28)	<.01	5.39	(0.28)	<.01	5.01	(0.25)	<.01	5.34	(0.27)	<.01
MAIN HYPOTHESES												
Staff	-	-	-	-0.02	(0.03)	.47	-	-	-	-	-	-
Type of interest organization												
- Research institute	0.05	(0.21)	.82	0.00	(0.52)	1.00	-0.16	(0.18)	.37	-0.04	(0.17)	.82
- Regional or local government	-0.8	(0.14)	<.01	-1.02	(0.29)	<.01	-0.38	(0.21)	.07	-0.39	(0.25)	.12
- Firm	0.12	(0.13)	.35	0.05	(0.36)	.90	0.08	(0.14)	.61	0.13	(0.12)	.29
- Professionel association	-0.46	(0.25)	.06	-0.48	(0.25)	.06	0.03	(0.28)	.91	0.12	(0.31)	.69
- Cross-sectoral business	0.19	(0.18)	.30	0.19	(0.18)	.28	0.21	(0.16)	.18	0.22	(0.18)	.21
- Sectoral business	-0.07	(0.10)	.45	-0.08	(0.10)	.41	-0.05	(0.10)	.64	-0.08	(0.09)	.38
- Civil society organization (ref category)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Policy position												
- To support	-0.31	(0.16)	.06	-0.31	(0.17)	.06	-	-	-	-0.31	(0.15)	.03
- To shape small parts	-0.42	(0.13)	<.01	-0.42	(0.13)	<.01	-	-	-	-0.4	(0.12)	<.01
- Unclear	-0.53	(0.13)	<.01	-0.53	(0.13)	<.01	-	-	-	-0.53	(0.11)	<.01
- To change most/block (ref category)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CONTROL VARIABLES												
Percentage of statements in EU outlets	0.07	(0.26)	.80	0.07	(0.26)	.80	0.04	(0.26)	0.87	0.01	(0.26)	.98
Level of mobilization												
- Domestic	-0.45	(0.26)	.08	-0.45	(0.26)	.08	-0.42	(0.28)	.14	-0.43	(0.29)	.14
- International	-0.6	(0.28)	.03	-0.59	(0.28)	.04	-0.55	(0.29)	.06	-0.61	(0.26)	.02
- European (ref category)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
INTERACTION EFFECTS												
Proportion of EU statements*level of mobilization												
- Proportion of EU statements*domestic	0.15	(0.29)	.60	0.16	(0.28)	.57	0.14	(0.32)	.65	0.16	(0.33)	.63
- Proportion of EU statements*international	0.27	(0.29)	.35	0.27	(0.30)	.37	0.34	(0.31)	.27	0.32	(0.27)	.25
Resources * organization type												
- Staff (logged)*Research institute	-	-	-	0.02	(0.04)	.61	-	-	-	-	-	-
- Staff(logged)*Regional or local government	-	-	-	0.02	(0.07)	.81	-	-	-	-	-	-
- Staff(logged)*Firm	-	-	-	0.07	(0.07)	.29	-	-	-	-	-	-
Alpha	0.59	(0.04)		-0.53	(0.07)		0.64	(0.04)		0.60	(0.04)	
MODEL FIT												
N			474			474			559			559
AIC			5528			5528			6530			6497
BIC			5594			5595			6586			6566
Log Likelihood			-2748			-2747			-3252			-3232
df			16			20			13			16

Table 2 presents four models. The first two models present a closer analysis of staff size, a variable for which we have a considerable number of missing values. These two models compare our results for only the dyads where staff resources could be identified (n=472). Model I excludes the staff variable, while Model II models all independent variables. When comparing the fit indicators for both models we observe that both models yield a significant improvement compared to the null-model. However, staff as well as the corresponding interaction effects (Model II) do not result in a significant improvement of the model fit compared to Model I ($2*(-LL--LL)=2$, $\Delta df=4$, $p=.74$) and the AIC and BIC values are higher for the less parsimonious model. Both the insignificant coefficient and the insufficient model fit demonstrate that resources do not adequately explain media prominence which leads to the rejection of our first hypothesis.⁷

Model III and IV model the dependent variable for the complete data-set (n=559 dyads), but without the staff variables. These models allow us to evaluate the impact of policy position on model fit. Again both models fit significantly better than the null-model. Yet, the inclusion of the position variable does significantly improve the fit of Model IV when compared to Model III ($2*(-LL--LL)=40$, $\Delta df=3$, $p<.01$) and the AIC and BIC values are lower for Model IV that takes into account policy position. As Model IV includes all units off analysis and shows the best fit indicators, we interpret our results based on this model.

All models show the same pattern, namely organization type – or the constituency represented by an organized interest – has no significant robust effect on media prominence. In some models we observed that regional and local authorities, firms and professional associations gain less coverage, but the effects are not always significant. Regarding, our second hypothesis, namely that civil society organizations with a diffuse constituency gain more media visibility, for instance because they use more media strategies in order to communicate with their constituency or to expand their membership and support base, cannot be confirmed.

The policy position organized interests adopt in specific legislative cases, however, has a significant effect in all the models where we included this variable (I, II, IV and V). Groups that support an EC legislative proposal or promote small incremental changes are significantly less prominent compared to those who wish ‘to block’ or ‘change most of a proposal’. The average predicted counts for the different position categories based on Model IV illustrate this effect well; for groups that oppose a policy proposal this is 174 ($s=17.03$) while this is only 127 ($s=13.85$) for groups who support a policy proposal, 116 ($s=8.6$) for groups who seek minor changes, and 102 ($s=9.43$) for groups who did not adopt a clear

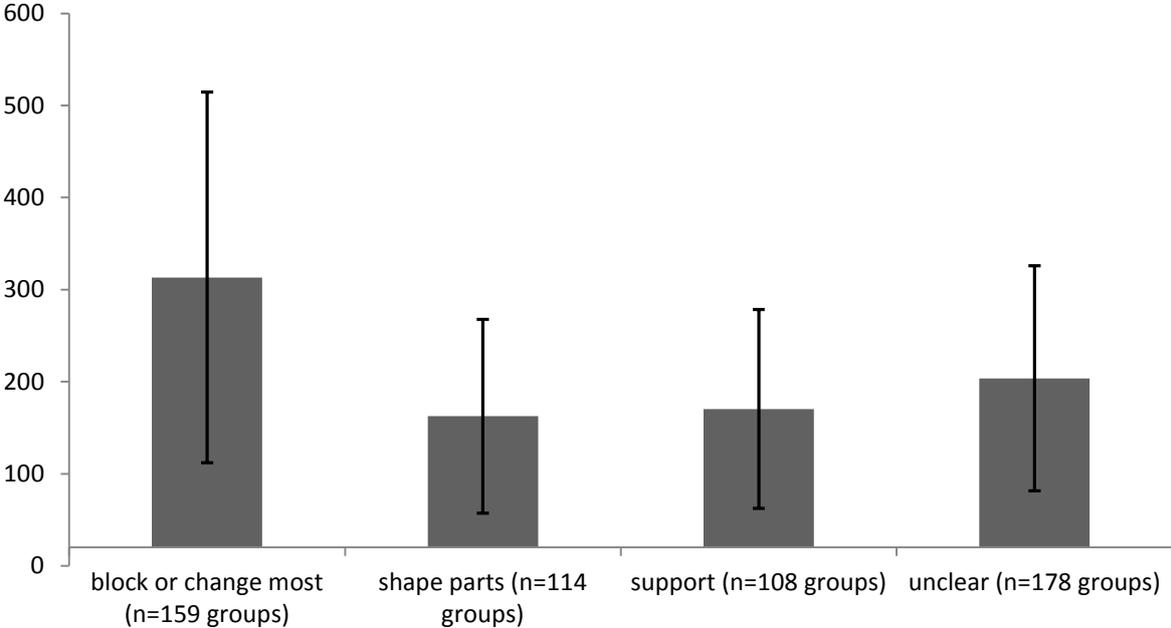
position. It is clear that the predicted count for opponents is significantly higher compared to those who seek minor changes. Based on these findings we can conclude that the adopted policy position contributes significantly to the media prominence of an organized interest, confirming our third hypothesis. Interest organizations that raise negative statements, irrespective of their type and resources, have a higher chance of gaining media prominence, compared to those with a more moderate, supportive or neutral stance.

The other control variables as well as the interaction effects are not significant. We have no indications that coverage is related to the media-outlet or how this outlet corresponds with the level at which an organized interest is active. Nonetheless, we need to admit that we have much less statements in the national media-sources, but still this difference does not affect our main finding. If actors oppose a policy they might get less statements in national outlets, but if they gain coverage, they gain more coverage than those who support the legislative proposal and their national coverage (in size) does not differ that much from the EU-level media-coverage. When it comes to the level of mobilization, international groups are significantly less prominent compared to EU-level groups, but again we cannot conclude that EU-level groups have a competitive advantage in gaining media prominence in the news compared to national groups, nor do we observe that national groups are more prominent in national media and EU groups more prominent in EU media.

To assess whether these findings hold in both national and EU media separately, we tested distinct models for national news media and EU media. For example, it could be that UK groups gain more attention from the *Financial Times*. The detailed results for these models (Model VI & VII) are presented in an online appendix to this article. Basically, these models show that national interest groups do not have a significant advantage to gain prominence in the national media. French and UK based organized interests are significantly less inclined to grow prominent in EU media outlets compared to other national interests. We also observe a difference in the effect of staff on media prominence across media outlets. In the national media outlets, staff does yield significant effects. More specifically firms and research organizations with a higher number of employees have a higher propensity to grow prominent in the news, whereas this effect is negative for civil society, business and professional associations. Or, interest groups with more (less) staff are somewhat less (more) prominent in national outlets. However, we need to remain cautious in making strong claims based on an analysis with only 140 interest-group proposal dyads; the number of observation in some of the categories are rather small (for instance we have three French, six German and

twelve UK organizations). Nonetheless, most importantly, also when controlling for these differences, the adopted policy position still generates a significant effect.

Figure 2. Average number of words, plus 95% confidence intervals (y-axis) per position-proposal dyad (352 combinations of 88 proposals and 4 positions)



In general, statements by groups opposing legislative proposals are significantly longer compared to statements made by groups that are more supportive. Yet, at the aggregate level of policy proposals, it could be that the entire set of groups that supports a proposal is larger (more groups that support the EC gain coverage) and/or that their total coverage (in words) is larger compared to the set of all opposing groups. In order to control for this possibility, we aggregated the individual statements at the level of policy proposal and position dyads, which implies a dataset with 4 different positions for 88 proposals or 352 entries representing the number of words one policy position received for each proposal. One advantage of this approach is that it somewhat accounts for non-coverage; if a position was not observed for a specific proposal, this position was attributed zero words and actors. A one-way ANOVA F-test was used in order to test whether the average number of words differs significantly for sets representing four different policy positions. The results are illustrated in Figure 2. Indeed, also this analysis shows that opposing statements are more prominent compared to supportive claims ($F=2.74$; $df=3$; $p=.04$). Per proposal the mean number of words devoted to statements seeking to block or change most of a proposal is 313

($s=56.27$), which is significantly more than the average of 170 words ($s=31.34$) for statements supporting proposals, 162 words ($s=28.79$) for groups seeking to shape some parts of the proposal and 203 words ($s=40.93$) when the position was unclear. Importantly, also the mean number of actors that gain media attention differs significantly for the different policy positions ($F=2.84$; $df=3$; $p=.03$). On average, we have slightly more opponents per proposal ($\bar{x}=1.81$; $s=0.24$) compared to those who seek to shape parts ($\bar{x}=1.30$; $s=0.20$) or support the proposal as it stands ($\bar{x}=1.23$; $s=0.16$) (see also Figure 2 for absolute numbers). So also at a more aggregate the level of legislative proposals, opponents gain more media prominence.

Conclusion

Our starting point was that the media prominence interest groups enjoy is scarce and not always distributed equally. Some groups enjoy more media prominence than others, which results in a skewed or biased media coverage. This article sets out to explain these varying levels of interest group media prominence in the context of EU legislative politics. We combined two logics to explain varying levels of media prominence, namely the motivations and capabilities of interest groups to *seek* media attention and the propensity of journalists and media gatekeepers to *grant* attention. Based on these logics we identified research hypotheses focusing on organization type, organizational resources and the cause for which an organized interest lobbied.

Most literature studying the public visibility of organized interest focused on organizational resources or organization type, and argued that media coverage tends to be biased towards the well-resourced organizations and specific types of interest groups, namely business interests or civil society organizations. With regard to the first hypothesis, our analyses do not show that organizational resources affect media prominence on EU legislative issues in the EU media positively (although we have some indications that it matters somewhat for national media). Contradictory to our expectations organization type does not matter in predicting prominence. In contrast to earlier research on national political systems, we cannot conclude that business gains more (Danielian & Page, 1994) or less (Binderkrantz, 2012) media attention in the EU. Rather, it seems that the media visibility reflects the overall distribution of political mobilization.

One major weakness of most media studies on lobbying is that they neglect whether conflict occurs, and if so, whether the different sides of a conflict are equally covered. Our results demonstrate that this is a key factor in explaining varying levels of media attention. Basically, the media prominence of organized interests is considerably shaped by the *policy*

position an organized interest adopts in relation to concrete pieces of legislation. Interest organizations that adopt a negative position – aiming to change most of or to block a legislative proposal – attract significantly more media attention compared to those who voice a milder, a supportive or unclear position.

Two mechanisms could explain why policy challengers gain more attention. To begin with, interests that feel threatened by and oppose a policy proposal are more keen to seek media exposure, and, second, the propensity of journalists to pay more attention to negative news. In this regard, we see considerable room for follow-up research, more in particular for teasing out whether organized interests that oppose particular legislative outcomes are more inclined to seek to expand the political conflict and/or whether journalists are more inclined to cover their views because of the news value of negativity and conflict (for instance Soroka, 2006; Wolfsfeld, 2004). Another explanation might be that statements from opponents gain more prominence because journalists select interest groups to make the ‘con case’ to balance against the policymakers who support a legislative proposal. Yet, the relevance of interest groups for such balancing is limited because the EC often faces resistance from the member-states and/or political groups in the European Parliament. For instance, elsewhere we demonstrate that media statements by Member of the European Parliament (MEPs) on the same legislative cases were mostly from MEPs seeking to shape parts of the legislative proposal instead of giving full support (Beyers et al., 2014b). Moreover, a considerable part of the interest groups that support the EC (see Figure 2), gains media attention (albeit less extensively compared to the con-side). Generally, our analyses show that media attention for EU legislative processes is heavily skewed, where only a few legislative cases are very salient and others are only briefly or never discussed. The media prominence of interest groups thus largely reflects the overall attention the media devotes to specific issues.

Finally, we need to acknowledge some limits of our research design. First, we only focus on those that made it into the media. Some groups might have tried to gain some coverage, but never succeeded, and others may have eschewed media attention. Our models are primarily about varying levels of media prominence among those groups that *did* make it into the media debate. It might indeed be possible that most of the groups opposing a legislative proposal never make it into the media. Then the bias might just be reversed. True, maybe opposing groups face difficulties in gaining access to the media. However, our analysis shows that opponents do gain considerable access and, most importantly, if they gain coverage, the scope of their coverage is higher. Yet, more detailed research looking at groups that did not make it into the news is advisable on this matter. Second, how media prominence

of interest groups affects public opinion or policy outcomes lies beyond the scope of this article, but this could be part of relevant follow-up research as several studies pointed at the potential impact media coverage has on public opinion and policy agendas (Druckman, 2001; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Duer & Mateo, 2014; Iyengar et al., 1982). Another pathway for further research would be to look at to what extent these media effects are shaped by the presence and statements of interest groups in the news. Third, our content analysis does not allow us to separate media push from pull factors in explaining varying levels of prominence. To know whether specific interests become more prominent because they either seek media coverage more intensively and/or because journalists prioritize them, interviews with organized interests and/or journalists could be a useful complementary strategy. Yet, recent work by (Hanegraaff et al., 2014) on lobbying at transnational conferences demonstrates that groups who oppose specific government policies are more inclined to apply media strategies or seek out the public debate, which indicates that our findings travel well beyond the specific context of the EU. Finally, another relevant generalization beyond the EU context is that the distribution of EU-level media attention for concrete policy proposals points at two different worlds of lobbying with, on the one hand, a considerable number of legislative cases that attract little or no political attention and, on the other hand, a smaller set of cases where many lobbyists are active, much political attention and politicization. In this regard, lobbying in Brussels does not differ that much from lobbying in Washington (see also Baumgartner and Leech, 2001; LaPira et al., 2014).

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Endnotes

¹ This project is part of a larger European Collaborative Research Project, INTEREURO, carried out by research teams in nine different countries under the auspices of the European Science Foundation (2012-2014; Beyers et al. 2014c). In addition, a US-based research team at the University of Virginia is affiliated to this project through an NSF research grant. The main goal of the project is to analyse strategies, framing and influence processes for a set of 125 legislative proposals submitted by the European Commission, in effort to better understand the involvement of civil society organizations in the decision-making process of the European Union.

² Inter-coder reliability analysis for the selecting of relevant articles is satisfying; we obtained a percentage overlap of 87 percent based on reliability analysis of 757 archived articles.

³ For 90 organizations (or 24 percent of the 379 identified organizations) we could not identify a useful website.

⁴ All this coding was conducted by two trained researchers and the inter-coder reliabilities are satisfying, with Krippendorff's alpha reliability coefficients of .82 and higher (based on double coding of a randomly selected set of 100 media statements).

⁵ In several of these cases statements were made by EU institutions or other public actors. This data will be analyzed more closely in other research papers.

⁶ The question is, however, how unique these results are and whether the idiosyncratic nature of the EU leads to these distributions. Unfortunately, we lack systematic evidence and the age of some data-sources makes that we need to be careful in comparing the EU with other political systems. For instance, the US population as mapped

by Schlozman and Tierny (1986) shows that the US interest group population has, compared to the EU, less public interests and civil society organizations. Yet, the media analysis by Danielian and Page (1994) shows that business is much less prominent in the media compared to civil society groups.

⁷ As a further robustness test we tested a fifth model for which we estimated the missing values through multiple imputation (see online appendix). Overall, when using multiple imputation estimates for staff, we obtain virtually the same insignificant results for staff and the interaction effects. We decided not to report this model here as multiple imputation techniques do not allow us to compare statistically the model fit of nested models on the basis of maximum likelihood estimates.